

# THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

---

ARTHUR BEVERLEY BAXTER






mq ✓

KAT

Mrs. Belle M. Ladd



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2018 with funding from  
University of Toronto



*The* BLOWER *of*  
BUBBLES







# *The* BLOWER *of* BUBBLES

BY

ARTHUR BEVERLEY BAXTER

McCLELLAND & STEWART  
PUBLISHERS TORONTO

1920



**COPYRIGHT, CANADA, 1920**  
**By McCLELLAND & STEWART, LIMITED, TORONTO**



TO  
MY MOTHER.





## PREFACE

It was one of Dumas' characters, I believe, who said: "I do not apologize—I explain." The purpose of this brief preface is to explain the many imperfections which of necessity appear in this volume.

It was at a dance after Armistice, given by American officers in the Palace Hotel, London, that I met a young lady who had landed from New York two days previously.

"My goodness!" she said, "they don't have any furnaces in their houses here; and I've been trying all day to buy some rubbers, and no one knew what I meant. My goodness! but they're backward over here."

I looked at her face and recognized the joyful mania of the explorer. She was "discovering" England.

Before the war, England was "discovered" fairly often—but during the war it became the passion of hundreds of thousands, Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, New-



## PREFACE

foundlanders, South Africans—we all brought our particular national viewpoint and centered it on the “tight little Island,” nor were we backward about telling the English of their faults. Each one of us stated (or implied) that his own country was the special acreage of God, and that the Kaiser ought to be made to live in foggy London as a punishment.

And for more than four years the Old Country listened patiently as the throngs of adventurers poured in from the world’s outskirts. The stately homes of England were opened in their stately, hospitable way; English taxicab drivers insulted and robbed us just as cheerfully as they did their own countrymen; English girls proved the best of comrades; and the Englishman proper continued to be the world’s greatest enigma.

So, in claiming admittance to that vast throng that has already discovered England, I do so with a certain humility but a hope that, when my words are sifted, some little ore of truth may be discovered at the bottom.

In three of the five stories of this collection, I have usurped the power of the Wizard of Oz, and have looked through three pairs of glasses. In “The Blower of Bubbles” an Englishman

## PREFACE

subjects his own country to analysis; in "Mr. Craighouse of New York, Satirist," the glasses used are American and the medium is a New Yorker; in "The Airy Prince" (the last and favorite child) a girl of sixteen from Picardy is transplanted by aeroplane for one full day in wartime London.

In the remaining two stories I have endeavored to paint something of city life in Canada in the one, and in the other to do some little justice to that least understood type—the French Canadian.

During an interesting but undistinguished career of nearly four years with the Canadian Forces, I realized that, although the army gives one plenty of food for thought, it sometimes fails to supply facilities for assimilation. *Par exemple*: "Mr. Craighouse of New York, Satirist," was started in hospital at Abbéville, France, where my fellow-patients assumed me to be a lovelorn swain, writing a love-letter that never left off. Later, "Mr. Craighouse" developed a couple of thousand words in a charming home of Scotland. The last part of the story was finished at a table in the Turkish baths of the Royal Automobile Club, London, where the attendants



## PREFACE

were good enough to consider me eccentric, but apparently not violent.

Under the robust companionship of several normal and talkative subalterns, "The Blower of Bubbles" was written in a hut at Seaford Camp during the month of November, 1918. As my stove was a consistent performer, nearly every evening a few choice souls gathered for cocoa and refreshments from home; and if their host persisted in writing at his improvised table it did not disturb their good-fellowship in the least, providing the author did not threaten to read his "stuff" aloud.

It was in that hut in the mud of Seaford that, one November morning, a little before eleven o'clock, we heard the sound of ships' sirens in Newhaven Harbor some miles away; then a distant shouting, that grew in a great crescendo, as it rode across the downs on the throats of thousands of soldiers, and passed us in one great prolonged roar, "The Germans have signed!"

We missed Armistice Day in London, but I like to think of the thirty Canadian officers, most of them veterans of many battles, gathered in the mess of that bleakest of camps, while one chap at the piano played the national anthems of the

## PREFACE

nations who had fought . . . and in voices that were not too steady we echoed the toast: "To the Allies and America."

And so "I do not apologize—I explain."

In avoiding the "war-story" type, I have followed my own inclinations, and have taken rather the inconspicuous parts played by ordinary people who had never dreamed of being actors in the world's greatest drama. To avoid the background of war would be utterly impossible, for war has been a fever in our blood these last four years, and not in one or two generations will our veins be free of it.

If it seems in these stories that there is a recurrent note on the necessity of artistic expression for the Old Country, the reason for it is that we came from the Dominions to a land we all knew, because English literature had made England our Mother-Country in the real sense of the word. It is the hope of many of us that the artists of Britain—whether they be writers, painters, or composers—will yet realize that the Empire looks to them, as well as to the knights of the air, to bridge the seas, and by their art make us feel as great a kinship in peace as we did in war. Dickens and Burns were more than writers; they



## PREFACE

were literature's ambassadors, and played no inconsiderable part in empire-building.

Perhaps, as the study of ordinary people gripped by emotions which left no one ordinary, this volume of stories may be of some little interest. They filled many dull hours in the writing. . . . It would be a rich reward for the author if he could think that they do away with a few dull hours in the reading.

ARTHUR BEVERLEY BAXTER

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES . . . . .	1
II. PETITE SIMUNDE . . . . .	97
III. THE MAN WHO SCOFFED . . . . .	141
IV. THE AIRY PRINCE . . . . .	191
V. MR. CRAIGHOUSE OF NEW YORK, SATIRIST	287





# *The* BLOWER *of* BUBBLES

## I

**S**NOW was falling in Sloane Square, quarreling with rain as it fell. Lamps were gleaming sulkily in Sloane Square, as though they resented being made to work on such a night, and had more than a notion to down tools and go out of business altogether. Motor-cars were passing through Sloane Square, with glaring lights, sliding and skidding like inebriated dragons; and the clattering hoofs of horses drawing vagabond cabs sounded annoyingly loud in the damp-charged air of Sloane Square.

It was Christmas Eve in Sloane Square, and the match-woman, the vender of newspapers, and the impossible road-sweeper were all exacting the largesse of passers-by, who felt that the



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

six-penny generosity of a single night atoned for a year's indifference to their lot. People were wishing each other a merry Christmas in Sloane Square, as they struggled along under ungainly parcels. The muffin-man was doing an enormous trade.

And I looked from my window and prayed for Aladdin's Lamp or the Magic Carpet, that I might place a thousand miles between myself and Sloane Square.

There was a knock at the door.

"Enter the Slave of the Lamp," said I, and the door opened to admit—my landlady, Mrs. Mulvaney.

"Will you be dining in?" she said. Her Irish accent hardly helped the illusion of the all-potent slave.

"And why not?" I asked.

"Ach, nothing, sor. I only thought——"

"An unwomanly thing to do, Mrs. Mulvaney."

"You're afther being a strange one, dining alone on Christmas Eve."

"Then join me, Mrs. Mulvaney."

I swear she blushed, and I felt more than a little envious of the nature which could convert

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

such a vinegary attempt at condescension into a gallantry.

"F'what would I be doing, taking dinner wid a child like you?"

I was twenty-five, but Mrs. Mulvaney looked on all men as equally immature.

"And have you not got no friends?" she went on, but I stopped her with a gesture.

"Thank Heaven—no!" I said. "I am one of intellectuality's hermits. An educated man in London is like the bell-cow of the herd—a thing apart."

"You're a great fool, I'm afther thinking."

"The foolish always damn the wise," I answered, with an attempt at epigrammatic misquotation.

Mrs. Mulvaney heaved a sigh. Its very forcefulness recalled the nautical meaning of the verb.

"You'd be a sight happier outside," she said. "Holy Mary knows I wouldn't be driving you into the streets, but I'm worried you'd get cross wid yourself at home."

To get rid of her, I put on my coat and went out. Perhaps she was right; things would have



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

been intolerable at home. Home! Such a travesty of the word! The sickly lamplight of Sloane Square was preferable.

"Merry Christmas, guv'nor!" said the road-sweeper.

"Merry fiddlesticks!" I growled, and gave him sixpence. I tried to avoid the vender of newspapers, but he spotted my fur collar with the instinct of a mendicant, handing me a paper and his blessing.

"'Appy Christmas, milord!" said he.

I paid him a shilling for his diplomacy.

Thinking to escape the match-woman, I altered my course, but with the intuition of her sex she contrived to put herself directly in my path.

"It's a cauld nicht," she moaned in a rickety, quavering Scottish voice—"a cauld, wintry nicht. Ye'll be haein' a wee box o' matches, aw'm thinkin'!"

I gave her twopence for them, and she shivered with cold as her skinny fingers clutched the coins. I can think of no excuse for my parsimony except the fact that I didn't need the wretched box—matches were not yet a luxury of the very exclusive.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Yes—in all Sloane Square, on that damp and foggy Christmas Eve in the year 1913, I doubt if a more morose, self-satisfied, cynical human being plunged into the mists than I. I was unhappy, and reveled in my very unhappiness. If it had been in my power, I would have sent a cloud of gloom into every home and over every hearth in London. There was something splendid, something classical, in my melancholy; it was like Hamlet's, but greater than Hamlet's, for he knew the reason of his mood, while mine was born of an intangible superiority to my day!

It is not easy, even now, to write of those days. The figure that crosses the screen of memory reminds me of Chevy Slyme—a debt-paying, respectable Chevy Slyme, forsooth!—but just as sulkily swaggering, just as superior, and not quite so human; for Chevy, at least, inspired the friendship of Mr. Tigg.

## II

Unconsciously following the bus route, I emerged eventually on Piccadilly, and was



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

jostled and ogled and blessed and cursed with the greatest heartiness. Somewhere near Bond Street I collided heavily with a young man who was trying to negotiate the crowd and at the same time lose nothing of the shop windows' display.

"A thousand devils!" I muttered, recoiling from the impact.

"A thousand pardons!" he said, raising his hat. The graceful lilt of his voice was peculiarly reminiscent; his smooth brow and silky fair hair were both familiar and elusive.

"One moment——" He gazed into my face with a searching look, keeping his hat poised in the air as if the better to concentrate his thoughts. "Not the Pest?" he said.

I nodded, and, if the truth be told, felt not a little pleased at the sound of the old *nom d'école* earned when I was at Westminster.

"And how," I said, "is the Blower of Bubbles?"

For answer he replaced his hat at a rakish angle and shook my hand with both his for what seemed a full minute, the crowd parting good-naturedly like a wave encircling a rock.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“My dear old Pest,” he said, “we shall dine together.”

“I’m sorry, but——”

“There is a perfectly vile restaurant half-a-mile from here, that has the best violinist and the worst cook in London.”

“My dear chap——”

“Of all the luck! Think of my running into you on Christmas Eve!”

And just then I noticed that we were no longer standing still, but proceeding up a side street, arm-in-arm, while his disengaged hand indicated the passing scene as if it were the most gorgeous bazaar of the Orient. He spoke with extraordinary rapidity, except in uttering certain words, when he would make a slurring pause, as a singer will let a note melt into a pianissimo, then race on again with renewed vigor. It was a fascinating trick of speech, and, added to the subtle inflections of his voice, never failed to startle one into the closest attention.

I turned to him once with some remark on my lips, and noticed that his eyes were dancing with merriment.

“What is it, Pest?” he cried. “Out with it!”

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

I smiled gloomily; but still it was a smile.

"Why," I said, "aren't the lamps in Sloane Square bright like these?"

He didn't answer. Probably he knew the truth would have hurt.

### III

What a hole to dine in on Christmas Eve! Such waiters—such guests—such food—such wine!

I believe the proprietor owned three such establishments, each, in a triumph of irony, called "Arcadia." The very linen of the waiters drooped disconsolately, and the whole place reeked of cabbage and wet umbrellas. My spirits, which had risen momentarily from their classic depths, sank like the sands of an egg-timer.

"My dear fellow," I said, "you can't mean to dine here?"

An oily waiter ambled up to us and wrung his hands in a paroxysm of welcome.

"Your tabil, Meester Norman," he said in



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

some nondescript foreign dialect, "iss ready."

Good heavens! The Blower of Bubbles had even ordered dinner in advance! With the feelings of an unwilling martyr, I followed my friend and his escort past tawdry millinery saleswomen, dining in state with their knights-errant of the haberdashery stores; by a table where a woman was gazing admiringly at a man with a face as expressionless as a pumpkin; through a lane of chattering, laughing, rasping denizens of the London that is neither West End nor East End—of people whose clothes, faces, and voices merged into a positive debauch of mediocrity.

When we were seated and had ordered something from the waiter, I turned to Basil Norman for an explanation.

"What is it?" I asked. "An affair with a seamstress, or are you just looking for 'copy'?"

He laughed and lit a cigarette.

"Pest," he said, "this is a caprice of mine, a tit-bit for my vanity. You would have chosen the 'Trocadero' or the 'Ritz,' with all the tyranny of Olympian and largessed waiters with whom it is impossible to attain the least pretence of equality. I prefer 'Arcadia,' where I am something

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

of a patron saint, and am even consulted by the proprietor."

"You play to humble audiences."

"Quietly; Pest—the proprietor might hear you. He is a very Magog for dignity, I assure you, in spite of his asthma."

"I gather, then, that you are a regular diner here?"

"Hardly that. But I am a little more consistent than most of his patrons. To be candid"—he leaned towards me as if it were a secret of the first magnitude—"it's his cook."

"His what?"

"His cook. Really, I'm afraid he's hardly first class."

"I am certain of it."

"He would have made an admirable medieval Jesuit, but, as a matter of fact, I wonder Steinburg——"

"The proprietor?"

"Yes. I don't know why he keeps him on. He says the fellow has a couple of blind children, and if he were dismissed under a cloud he would have trouble in securing employment."

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

But that's not business. The fellow's an ass, isn't he?"

Whereupon his face beamed with delight, and his gray eyes twinkled like diamonds. My comment on the matter was stifled by the arrival of *hors-d'œuvre*. I had no idea that one tray could hold such a variety of unpalatable things. At the table next to us a woman laughed boisterously, her shoulders, which were fat and formless, vibrating like blanc-mange.

"Ah!" said Basil Norman; "Klotz has arrived."

He indicated a low platform, where a dingy pianist, pimply of countenance and long of hair, was strumming the barbaric discords that always accompany the tuning of stringed instruments. A violinist, with his back towards us, was strangling his instrument into submission; while a cellist, possessed of enormous eyebrows and a superb immobility of pasty-facial expressionlessness, sat by his cello as though he had been lured there under false pretenses, and had no intention of taking any part in the proceedings—unless forced to do so by a writ of habeas-corpus. A fourth musician, who seemed all



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

shirt and collar, blew fitfully into a flute, as if he realized it was an irrelevant thing, and was trying to rouse it to a sense of responsibility.

"Which," I asked, "is Klotz?"

As I spoke the violinist turned about and caught my host's eye. They both bowed—Norman cordially; the musician, I thought, with restraint. The fellow stood out as a man apart from his accomplices; his high forehead and dreamy eyes were those of an artist, though a receding chin robbed his face of strength. He was the type one sees so often—able to touch, but never grasp, the cup of success.

"Klotz," said Norman, "is superb. He has the touch of the artist about him. His tone is not always good, and sometimes he scratches; but when he is at his best he does big things. So many people can perform at music—just as so many write at words—but Klotz plays with color. His art has all the charm of a day in April. He will caress a phrase according to his mood, like a mother crooning to her child. To know how to hesitate before a note in a melody, as a worshiper hesitates at the entrance to a shrine, is Art, and an Art that cannot be taught.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

It is so with painters, writers, musicians—they must have that sense of color, that instinct that brings each subtle nuance of expression into being.”

I began to feel bored.

Suddenly the orchestra became animated and burst into a waltz, one of those ageless, rhythmic compositions that might have been the very first or the very last waltz ever written. Supported by wailing strings and the irrelevant flute, the enjoyment of the diners took on fresh impetus. The lady with the shoulders became a vibrating obbligato. The pumpkin-faced man beamed fatuous delight, an electric light behind him giving the odd effect that he was illuminated inside like a Hallow-e'en figure. A girl, who might have been pretty if she hadn't rouged, took a puff from her toilet-case and powdered her nose. She felt that the evening was commencing. Over the whole scene my melancholy brooded as a ghostly presence. To me it seemed like the dominant seventh in a chord of surfeiting commonplaceness; once it was heard, the whole pitch of the evening would alter to another key.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Fortunately the dominant seventh remained unheard.

The waltz stopped, and we turned our undivided attention to dinner.

“Klotz,” said my host, pouring me a glass of wine, “should have made a mark, but——”

“Damn Klotz!”

“That has been done, Pest. The Bricklayers’ Union, or something equally esthetic, took exception to him for one reason or another, and prevailed upon its sister-cabal to debar him from the big orchestras. To offend your Union, dear boy, is to accomplish the total eclipse of your future. Even genius to-day is subject to regulations. Klotz is in a worse position than a clerk with a Board School education trying to secure employment in a London bank.”

“Confound it!” I said, “there must be some spheres reserved for gentlemen.”

His twinkling eyes steadied, and a dreamy look crept into them. “Pest,” he murmured, “some day England is going to thank God for the gentlemen—who were educated at Board Schools. Listen!—the cellist is playing Saint-Saëns.”



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Dinner—or the mess of foodstuff's dignified by the name—was almost finished when Klotz, the violinist, started one of the rare melodies which Wagner permitted himself—the Song to the Evening Star.

It was being beautifully played—even I would have admitted that—but I could not account for the troubled look that crept into my companion's face, driving the gayety and the whimsicality from it as a cloud obscures the sunlight.

"Klotz," he said anxiously, "is in great sorrow."

"How the deuce," I muttered, with a feeling of creepiness stealing over me, "can you tell that? Do you read it in his face?"

He shook his head. "Listen!" he said; "can't you hear it? Can't you feel the tears in it?"

And in spite of myself I remained silent, held irresistibly by the double fascination of the German's artistry and the sense of mystery engendered by Norman. The last sob of the G string quivered to its finish. The crowd applauded perfunctorily, then applied themselves to the

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

more essential things of life—food, wine and noise.

Rousing myself from the reverie into which I had fallen, I turned to Norman, and found his chair vacated. I started. He had reached the platform, and was talking earnestly to the violinist. Half-contemptuous and half-interested, I watched the pantomime as they talked. Norman's hands were emphasizing some point, and every gesture was a pleasure to the eye; the musician was protesting, but with steadily abating determination. Then the scene came to a climax, and the German disappeared.

Holding the violin in his arms, Basil Norman mounted the platform, the fingers of his left hand picking quiet, pizzicato notes from the strings.

"My friends——" His voice traveled like sound on the ocean at twilight; the room subsided into silence, and diners craned their necks to see him. The woman with the shoulders brought them to a standstill, like an electric fan that had lost its current.

"My friends"—what a charming voice the fellow had!—"I do not want to bring a note of

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

sorrow into your happiness. You are here, like my companion and myself, for enjoyment; but Herr Klotz . . . his wife is very ill; she is perhaps dying; and, my friends, it is very hard that he should play while his wife is dying . . . on Christmas Eve . . . in a strange country. You are English, and I know you are kind. I have sent him home, and I promised that I would take his place, as well as I can take the place of such an artist. For you who work so hard, it is not fair to spoil your happiness on this of all nights—but you will forgive me? Good!”

And his face had a whimsical, tender look.

A murmur of sympathy rose from the crowd, but died away as he raised the violin in his hands and brought from it a tone that breathed over them like a benediction. It was Gounod's "*Ave Maria*," and the pianist's fingers were mothering the keys as they had not done since his ambition evaporated like a cloud on a summer day.

It was exquisite—haunting. It was a prayer to Mary, but a prayer sung in a field of daisies



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and violets. There was sorrow in it, but it was the grief of a girl over a shattered dream. It was mature artistry, yet was born of sunshine and throbbed with the primrose sweetness of youth. It touched one like the face of a beautiful child.

Still caressing the violin, he repeated the "*Ave Maria*," whistling a unison. With almost any one else it would have been commonplace; with him it was a sound more pleasing than any flute, and only accentuated his sense of emancipation from the thrall of years. He played "*Still wie die Nacht*," "*Old King Wenceslaus*," "*Meditation*" from *Thaïs*, "*Intermezzo*" of Mascagni; and whatever he did, or however hackneyed the piece, he surrounded it with a joyousness that trembled on the brink of tears.

I looked at my watch; it was nearly midnight, and the evening so dreaded was almost at a close. He had put down his violin with a gesture of finality, when the prolonged outburst of applause changed his decision, and, with another of those rare smiles, he took the instrument once more.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Maxwellton's braes are bonnie  
Where early fa's the dew,  
And it's there that Annie Laurie  
Gi'ed me her promise true. . . .

The violin seemed to speak the words; and I'll swear there wasn't a woman in the place who wasn't recalling the sweet innocence of her first love. He had hardly finished, when the man with the face like a pumpkin jumped to his feet, and I rubbed my eyes.

The fellow had changed. His face had expression. Confound it! there was something rather splendid about his features—a kindliness—a——

“Young feller, m'lad,” he was saying, “I knows I speaks for hevery one when I says we ain't 'eard music like that there since we was knee-'igh to a grass'opper, and I knows you won't take it hamiss if we was to pass the 'at and——”

I held my breath. What would the Blower of Bubbles say?

“You're a brick, sir!” His voice was a mellow contrast to the other's. “My friends, this

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

gentleman has suggested that we pass the hat for our poor friend Klotz."

"I didn't neither," protested the benefactor. "Leastways——"

But the woman of the shoulders cut him short by placing two shillings beside him. It was tactful of her, a kindly thing to do, and again I was amazed. There was a womanly, motherly look about her as she turned away, and her eyes were radiant like stars in a mist.

I think I gave ten bob—it must have been a considerable amount, for the girl who would have been pretty if she hadn't rouged looked straight into my eyes and said something that sounded like a blessing. I hope it was; she made me think of a little sister I once had.

And then we were walking together again in the street, and the crowds were thinner than before. I cannot remember what we talked of, but I know I said to him, "Where did you learn to play like that?"

And he answered, "My dear old boy, music must be loved, not learned."

Then we were in Sloane Square, at my flat, and I was thanking him, or he was thanking me



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

—I forget which; and he promised to call at noon next day to take me to Klotz's home. . . . And the lamps in Sloane Square seemed duller than before.

Selfishness does not die in an hour, but the bachelor who looked from his window that night was a different man from the one who had spoken to Mrs. Mulvaney. He was thinking . . . and much is accomplished in itself when a man is made to think.

A distant clock struck one.

### IV

I have never known any one to change so little with the cycle of years as Basil Norman. When he came to Westminster, at the age of twelve, he had an easy nonchalance, a delightful insouciance, that never left him. He went from form to form, trod the stone-flagged passages as others did; but the youth of seventeen that left Westminster bore the same smiling, detached personality as when he entered. The atmosphere of tradition interested but did not drug him; the Elizabethan pancake impressed

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

him less than did a contemporary Edwardian soap-bubble.

Conscientious form-masters recognized his extraordinary abilities, and gave him the benefit of well-worded and impressive homilies on achievement. Sometimes for effect they quoted Latin. Norman would counter with a "Greek remark." He never studied, but more than one scholar owed success to the eleventh-hour coaching of Basil Norman. Learning, like everything else, came to him as a needle to a magnet.

With a curious air of detachment he watched the panorama of schoolboy life, noticing with a discerning eye the various strata upon which public-school morality is founded, assigning the relative importance of scholarship and cricket, and nodding knowingly as the process of standardization brought similarity of speech, accent, thought, and vocabulary to all his fellows.

He was like a Puck who had never been really young, but who refused to become a day older.

For a few weeks he played cricket, but without reverence. During a match he kept up (*sotto voce*, of course) a running commentary of philosophy which, according to our ethics,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

was vulgar. I shudder to think what he would have done if Westminster had adopted baseball.

On one occasion the captain of the eleven took upon himself to point out to Basil Norman the error of his ways. The worthy demigod deplored Norman's habit of lying on the grass during practice and inventing couplets on the various members of the team. The captain also said that, providing he would take the game seriously, there was a future for him as a cricketer. Whereupon Norman, from his recumbent position, misquoted most of the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, unblushingly attributing Hamlet's indecision towards living to his doubts of himself as a cricketer. When he finished he rose to his feet, and our comments were frozen at the sight of his face.

His cheeks had a ghastly pallor and his eyes were brilliant, but with a fixed, glaring intensity. And as we looked his expression changed—the color returned with a glow of warmth to his skin, and his eyes were gray and humorous. Being boys, we forgot about it as quickly as it had happened.

The next Saturday we played Charterhouse,



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and though the score was heavily against us, Norman gave the finest exhibition of batting I have seen in public-school cricket, scoring a century and winning the match for us. He was frail but lithe, and with an air of aplomb batted the offerings of Charterhouse to all points of the compass. At the finish of the game we crowded around him, but he smiled a little wearily, and shook his head.

“I am finished with cricket,” he said.

Bewilderment, then anathema, broke like a thunder-shower upon the head of Basil Norman. We pleaded; we argued; we threatened; then we used language which possessed the merit of forcefulness and frankness. We called him a swine, a rotter, a skunk, and an absolute cad. Some one ventured the opinion that he was a perfect stink, and we all stood about him like the Klu Klux Klan trying a negro malefactor.

“Gentlemen,” he said—and there was a delightful touch of irony in the word—“you have come to bury, not to praise, me; yet, unlike Cæsar, I am not ambitious.”

“Swine!” said Smith tertius (or was it quartus?).

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“In spite of the witty comment of me learned friend,” said Norman, after the manner of the leading counsel of the day, “I have always held the opinion that life is a thing to be sipped, not drunk. I have played cricket—*veni, vidi*, I scored a century! I would not spoil me appetite, milords, by overgorging.”

“Your conduct,” said Grubbs, the captain, “is rotten. It shows that you don’t give a fig for the honor of the school. If you want to be a pig, you can wear the cap of one.” (We all knew what he meant, and admired him frightfully for his venture into the quagmire of metaphor.) “We will send you to Coventry until you come to your senses.”

The culprit bowed airily.

“You will lose much more by my silence than I by yours,” he said—and it takes considerable courage to make such a statement to a tribunal of schoolboys.

If Norman suffered from our aloofness, he took it with the same nonchalance as he had taken our plaudits. Oddly enough, he had no intimate friends, and all of us, partly out of resentment against his pose of onlooker, and more

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

from the love of torture which links the school-boy to the savage, performed our duty of silent punishment with a zeal which deserved a better inspiration. We forgot how he had made friends with the misfits whose square personalities were being drawn through the round hole of public-school life. Little chaps he had taken in hand on arrival when they wanted to weep for loneliness turned from him as if he held contagion. All the sensitive, shrinking ones about whom he had thrown his cloak of vivacity, and who were now grown bold and self-reliant, let him pass from the Little Dean's Yard to his house and through the ancient passages, a lonely debonair figure that always smiled. . . . And no one spoke to him. I, whom he had named "The Pest," thus turning my naturally perverse sulkiness into a subject of jest and good-humor, took a special delight in watching the man who had been sentenced by his peers to solitude in the midst of a crowd.

His peers? . . . Was it Smith tertius (or quartus) who used the word "swine"?

Two weeks had passed, and we were to play Winchester a decisive match on our grounds,



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

which, as land near the cathedral is rather difficult to obtain, are almost a mile from the school.

The stage was set. Youthful scholars of ten and twelve walked in their gowns, their brows knit with thought, their eyes blinking from over-study. Little chaps struggled under the responsibility of silk toppers, and conversed solemnly on the deterioration of the tuck-shop; and the Olympian creature who was the head-boy of the school lounged outside the scoring-booth as if he were "fed up" with nectar, and would like some brown October ale for a change—a pose much favored by the best people in England. There was an excellent audience of the secondary sex, composed of proud mothers and apologetic sisters, whose presence was necessitating a sort of Jekyll and Hyde attitude on the part of their schoolboy relatives, who were endeavoring to be polite to their "people" and at the same time give the impression to their *confrères* that the women were mere acquaintances—accidental dinner partners, as it were.

No schoolboy of twelve likes to admit to a mother.

Surrounding the field there is a high iron

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

fence, through the railings of which, or on top, a motley collection of gamins cheer on their wealthier brethren of the silk hats. Naturally no notice is taken of these uninvited guests. It is quite all right for them to shout for Westminster if it gives them any pleasure, but what has a silk hat in common with a red kerchief and a slouch-cap?

On the day of the match they seemed in larger numbers than usual, and the top of the fence was covered with urchins, who retained their position of vantage as though the law of gravitation were no concern of theirs, keeping up a shrill chorus as Winchester went out for a moderate score.

With the odds all in our favor we went in to bat, Grubbs, the captain, and I leading off. The first ball was wide, but to feel the play of my muscles I took a perfunctory swing at it with my bat. The effect was extraordinary. . . . The crowd of Cockney youngsters raised a volume of sound as if my bat had been a baton and they a chorus.

“Gow it, Pest!” “That’s the style, Gloomy!”  
“Troy t’ other hend, Bluntnose!” “Gee, he’s got

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

odd socks on!" "Nah then, Spiderlegs!" (The blunt nose and the legs I admit to, but the accusation of odd socks was pure malice.)

The next ball, with no twist at all, bowled me clean, and I walked off the field to the tune of high-pitched shrieks of delight, and with a face that flushed a dark red. My place was taken by Smith tertius (or quartus), whose appearance caused an even greater furore than mine.

"'Ooray for Bones!" greeted the lanky youth as he emerged—" 'im as his the loife of the school!" (He was the most morose of boys.) " 'I, Bones, 'oo did you crib from this time, eh?" (A subtle allusion to an ancient offense which had almost earned him expulsion.)

The first ball came for Smith with an inviting hop. He watched it—went to strike at it—changed his mind—reconsidered his decision, and swung at the air as the ball passed over the bails by an inch, a feat which seemed to gratify our enemies on the fence immensely.

"Nah then, Bones, non o' that there contortionizing!" " 'It the ball, Bones; don't miss it!"

And he did—a miserable little pop into the



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

air; the chap in the slips didn't have to move a foot to gather it in.

Mr. Smith then added his proof that Shakespeare was right when he said in this world we have our exits and our entrances.

The next six batters went out for a score of eleven, bowled clean by the most intimate volume of abusive chaff ever endured by a cricket team. Skeletons were not only being taken from their closets, but paraded brazenly before the eyes of the world. The secret history of Westminster was screamed from the fence-tops.

It was after the loss of our eighth wicket that Grubbs and I, who had stolen round by the street, stalked and discovered their ringleader.

"That's him," said the captain hoarsely—the situation was too tense to permit of the niceties of grammar. I followed the line of his accusing finger—and gasped. There was no mistaking those gray twinkling eyes, although they were almost hidden behind a huge bandage, presumably for mumps. He was dressed in a rough coster suit, with a villainous cap on one side of his head and a bandit's red kerchief about his neck.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"It *is* him," I said dramatically.

"I thought so," said Grubbs, and cleared his throat. "Norman," he cried. "Kid—Norman."

The young rascal, who was sitting on top of a post, more like a Puck than ever, swiveled about and solemnly winked one eye. "Do I understand that the ban of silence is lifted?" he said from behind the mumps bandage.

Grubbs considered, and then made a tactful and instantaneous decision. (Small wonder that a few years later he was entrusted with a war mission to Washington, of the utmost delicacy.)

"You've had your revenge," he said, "and the joke is on us. Call your mob off, will you?"

"You're quite sure you wouldn't like us to encourage the remainder for a change?"

"Quite sure."

"So be it, my captain."

He blew a whistle through his fingers, and in a moment the fence was denuded of mortals like a tree smitten by an autumn gale. The Blower of Bubbles removed his bandage, and presented a stocky youth with three shillings.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Buy sweets for the crowd,” he said, “and mind—play fair.”

“Right you har’, guv’nor”; and the mob disappeared. And thus ended the riot of the slouch-cap against the silk hat. To-day, if you are passing the field during a match, you will see that the gamins are still there, but they shout only for Westminster.

We were just turning away, when Basil Norman laid his hand on Grubbs’s forearm, as a girl might do, and his eyes had a wistful look.

“Before I change into more fitting garb,” he said airily, then paused. . . . My breathing seemed to stop at the sight—his face had gone suddenly white, and his eyes were glazed.

“Grubbs!” he cried, and his voice sounded hollow. “Don’t you understand? . . . Oh, *you damned fool*, can’t you see it’s my heart?”

## V

After Westminster I went to Cambridge, and succeeded in cultivating the Oxford manner, by which all Cambridge men are known. When I emerged from there I offered myself to the



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

highest bidder (a sudden bankruptcy of my father having made an occupation essential).

A London newspaper was the fortunate winner in the mad race for my services, though it would have been difficult for it to lose, as there was but one entry.

I became a writer of power—not quite so much so as the gentleman to-day who wields his pen as he would a bludgeon, and succeeds in writing a powerful article each week; but still I was a writer of strength. I damned the present, doubted the future, and deplored the past. I became an honored member of the group of London writers whose entire genius is exhausted in criticism. I secured a bowing acquaintance with Bernard Shaw, and always spoke of H. G. Wells as Mr. Wells. It was obvious to me that to achieve literary success in England one must abuse England—but especially any one who tried to change her.

Some of my *confrères* sided with Bernard Shaw and attacked middle-class morality and patriotism. Mr. Arnold Bennett had a certain following, though we agreed that his Five Towns stories were not really critical, but merely

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

observant. We did not know at the time that he had it in him to write *The Pretty Lady*, which was to be neither. For myself, I was drawn towards Mr. Wells, and hit at everything like a blindfolded pugilist.

We agreed with Granville Barker that Irving had reduced the value of Shakespeare by overstaging; and we endorsed the opinion of a dramatic critic, known to the public as "Jingle," who said that Shakespeare's lines were often worthy of an Oxford undergraduate.

For pastime we abused Lord Roberts as a monomaniac, and Winston Churchill as a kleptomaniac with a passion for stealing the thunder of others. We even argued that the Church had lost its grip, and wrote eloquently on the value of doubt. With admirable *esprit de corps* we refrained from attacking the public-school system, though we realized that one could always get a hearing by so doing.

And every year those schools were turning out their thousands and the universities their hundreds; every year our number was strengthened by well-routined brains that took to destructive criticism like a German to barbarity.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Somebody was writing our puerile dramas; some one was producing the trash which flooded our book-stalls; some brain was conceiving the tawdry stuff which was educating the millions in the cinemas. . . . But we thanked Heaven that we were not as other men. We were England's educated class. For the education of England fails to teach one that a country's art and literature are as vital to the nation as speech to the individual.

I took a flat in Sloane Square and read Russian novels. Whenever I discovered a new Russian author, I quoted him as if I had known him all my life; it used to pain me to find how unrecognized he was by my fellows. I attended the opera only on Russian nights, and I became a devotee of the Russian dancers. I used to quote Russian in my paper, and brought down the curse of a hundred typesetters upon my head.

I think every writer has his Russian period.

Once or twice I heard of Basil Norman, though our paths did not cross. Some one claimed that Norman could have been a great violinist, if—— Another told me that *Punch*



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

had published a delicate little sonnet of his that had the quality of tears about it. There was no question (he said), if—— An artist I met had painted one landscape that defied criticism—even ours—and I spoke of the exquisite coloring and detail of the foreground.

“I could not have done that,” he said, “but for Basil Norman, who brooded over me like an inspiration. The work is mine, but the conception his. If——”

Yet the world did not know of his existence. He remained a detached personality, treading lightly where sorrow was, singing his song of the sunlight wherever ears had become dulled with discouragement. A fantastic, gentle, twinkling-eyed prince in a kingdom of butterflies and violets. Try as I would, I could not refrain from contrasting my life of literary vivisection with his primrose youth that seemed eternal, springing from a genuine joy in living, a youth that was as perfect as a melody of Chopin’s.

“The happiest of Christmases, old Pest!”

The subject of my thoughts was standing be-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

fore me, and the bells were clamoring exultantly on the frosty air.

I gripped his hand, and something in his eyes told me the truth. . . . He had come for me because I was lonely and needed him.

And the message of the bells took on a new meaning.

### VI

We walked into the brisk, vibrating sunshine of a glorious Christmas morning. He had taken my arm, and was chatting gayly on everything from "cabbages to kings." Sometimes his nostrils dilated, and he would look up as if he were actually drinking in the ozone of the air; and he seemed younger than ever, with a joyousness born of sheer intoxication with life. We walked for a mile, and all the time his mood was as happy and stimulating as the sunshine sparkling in the December air.

Turning down a street, we passed a church from which the worshipers were emerging, and a mother with two sons on the brink of manhood held our attention for a moment. The lads had a gentleness of feature, an unconscious grace

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

that sometimes is the attribute of adolescence, and their mother walked between them, proudly—they were her masterpieces. For some time Norman chatted amiably, but I could see that a pensive shadow was steadily creeping over the brilliancy of his spirits.

“They tell me,” he said in subdued tones, breaking suddenly from the topic in hand, “that both my parents hoped for a girl when I was born. And sometimes I have thought that there is a little of the feminine in my nature. I love the pretty things of life, and there are times when I have an unmistakable sense of intuition.”

I waited silently, but it was some moments before he resumed.

“Somewhere ahead,” he said dreamily, “in months or years to come, I see a vision of a woman in black, coming from church alone, and her head is bowed with grief——” He passed his hand over his brow with a weary, querulous movement, and shadows appeared beneath his eyes. “Where—where are the two sons? Not dead?”

He smiled wistfully and replaced his hand in my arm.



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“The picture we saw just now,” he said, “is my conception of England—the real England of noble mothers and noble sons. But something tells me that the woman in black is England too, mourning for her sons who will never—come back.”

With an effort he squared his shoulders and forced a laugh from his lips.

“Pest!” he cried, “I should be burned as a witch. Heigho! it’s a pretty go when one has to turn lugubrious on a Christmas morning. Cheer us up, Pest. Tell me about yourself—whom you are in love with, and your dreams for the days to come. Let’s blow bubbles—shall we?—and see what fresh beauties we can find in this charming adventure called life!”

And I laughed with him, exchanging philosophies light as air; but the chimes that rang out all about us had still another meaning. There was a warning in the pealing discords that broke on the quiet air; there was a requiem in the notes that lingered like an echo, then murmured ominously to silence.

I shivered as though I had a chill, for something of Norman’s spirit had seized me, and I

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

felt that both the warning and the requiem were—for England.

### VII

At the head of a stairway which one reached by going through a tobacconist's, Herr Klotz greeted us with guttural cordiality. We asked after his wife, and were told that she was a little better, though very weak, and had insisted upon seeing her guests before they left, if they would be so kind as to visit the sickroom.

On the contents of an enormous hamper sent from "Arcadia" (and, I am certain, paid for by Norman) the German and the two of us lunched with all the bonbomie of bohemians. Basil Norman was in the best of spirits, so much so, in fact, that Klotz was constantly overcome with laughter, and on three occasions was forced to rush away to acquaint his wife "mit der amuzing veet of zee altogedderillustrious Herr Norman."

By no means least in importance, Klotz's little son of about four years of age sat in a high chair and chuckled knowingly whenever he deemed the humor had reached a necessary climax.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Though he was not unlike his father in the shape of his head, his chin did not recede, and one could only assume the mother had supplied the qualities lacking in the father. Never for a moment did the child lose interest in the proceedings; he followed throughout the facial expression and the play of conversation of his elders. His face interested me so intensely that I found myself glancing at him whenever his interest in the others gave me a chance; there was so much of promise and heredity about him.

"And what," I said, during a momentary lull in the merriment, "is Master Siegfried to become?" We had learned his name a moment before.

"Siegfried," said his father, "tell zee gentlemen vot you to be already intend."

The little chap smiled, but without self-consciousness. "A conducthtor," he lisped, "like Herr Nikith."

Klotz crossed his hands upon his ample waistcoat and beamed paternally.

"Your baton bring," he said, "und der score *Tristan*."

With profuse apologies for this display of



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

juvenile precocity, the violinist hurried after the boy, and reëntered a moment later with his violin and a music-stand, which he proceeded to set up.

Siegfried followed close on his heels with the full orchestral score of the last act of *Tristan and Isolde*, which almost obscured him from sight. Placing it on the stand, he retired in a dignified manner; and Herr Klotz, taking a chair, seated himself at the left of the stand, and proceeded to tune his fiddle to pitch, varying the proceedings with imitations of French-horns, vagrant clarionets, and irresponsible trombones in the mélange of discord which always precedes the entrance of the conductor. Norman, who had been enjoying the scene to the full, suddenly rose to his feet.

“Herr Klotz,” he said sternly, “I protest.”

The tuning ceased, and the violinist looked anxiously at his guest. “You do not like dis, zumtimes?” he faltered.

“I object,” cried Basil, “to being left out.—Herr Siegfried!” He raised his voice. “Herr Siegfried!”

The little chap walked solemnly in, a baton in his hand. “Yeth?” he said.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“*Mein Herr*, my friend and myself desire to join your orchestra.”

The youthful conductor considered, ruminatingly. “You blay goot?” he said.

“Wonderfully. I was comb-and-tissue-paper-player in the Cascade Steam Laundry Orchestra, and my friend——”

“He ith goot alzo?”

“Pest, speak for yourself.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Far be it from me to brag,” I said, rather lamely, “but I was first violinist to His Majesty the King of Diddle-doodledums.”

“Ah, yes,” cried Norman; “and you were dismissed because of your unfortunate habit of playing an octave flat.” He leaned over and put his lips to Siegfried’s ear. “Let him play the drums,” he said in a stage whisper.

Amidst roars of delight from the older Klotz, the youngster left the room, and returned in a minute’s time, carrying an immense tin dishpan and a broken broom-handle, which musical impedimenta he entrusted to my tender mercies, and then sedately stalked from the scene once more. With mixed emotions I carried my pan

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and stick over to the extreme right, and placed a chair beneath the spot where the stage-box would be, calmly surveying the assumed audience with that look of waggish melancholy one associates with gentlemen of the drums. Norman, whom Klotz had armed with the combined ingredients of his instrument, placed a chair half-way between the conductor's stand and myself, and together we joined Herr Klotz in a two-minutes' orgy of discordant preparation. With a desire to increase the variety of my percussion effects, I conscripted an extra chair into service, placed it back towards me, and prepared to use my cane as an auxiliary drumstick.

By common consent we achieved a moment's unanimity of silence, which was seized by Herr Siegfried as the auspicious moment for his entrance. Without the least loss of dignity he clambered onto his chair, as we applauded, perfunctorily, by hammering our alleged music-stands with non-existent bows; and, turning to the audience, he bowed with the restraint of genius—a feat of condescension which appeared to delight the throng hugely, for he was constrained to turn about and acknowledge their



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

plaudits a second time before they would allow him to proceed.

As drummer I assumed an air of morose boredom.

The noise of the audience having subsided, the conductor opened his score and nodded to his *Concertmeister*, Herr Klotz, who carefully found the required place in the orchestration.

"Blay der 'Liebestod' music," said he in his most professional manner to us. We nodded knowingly, and found the required part in the last act of our scores, after turning over a vast number of visionary pages.

"Dowe begin at the beginning?" asked Norman.

"Yes," I answered, "and leave off at the end." After which sally I laughed immoderately, and began to understand the instinct which causes a humorist to enjoy his own wit more than any other's.

A rap on the stand brought my mirth to a close. Both arms were extended in the air—a last look at both sides of the orchestra (there must have been a hundred of us)—the left hand slowly poised to indicate "piano"—the right hand gently raised—and then the strings were

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

brought into action. I had intended, as another excellent jest, to give a tremendous crash on the pan at the start, so as to bring down the leader's wrath, but something in the little chap's attitude stopped me. This was not play to him—it was real; and, to my amazement, it seemed no less vivid to my fellow-burlesquers. Herr Klotz was playing the chromatic development of the opening as if it had been Covent Garden and the real Nikisch conducting. The Blower of Bubbles was giving one more proof of his amazing versatility. In some manner he was imitating a cello, and he *knew* the music. Where he had learned it one could only conjecture—but when did he learn anything?

Silently I watched the serio-comic development. The boy was conducting remarkably, with unerring artistry, sustaining the exact Wagnerian *tempi*, and, with little exaggeration, indicating the crescendo and diminuendo which colors all the great master's composition. How much of it he knew or whether he was following his father's violin I could not make out, but his earnestness fascinated me; and suddenly his eyes turned towards mine. I gripped the broom-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

handle—but no, it was merely a warning that my time was imminent. I think my breath came short as I waited. Then his eyes sought mine once more, and inclining towards me, his baton called for the drums. It was *I* he was conducting, and no one else! And I vibrated the broom-handle against the dish-pan, only to stop instantaneously as his baton moved to subtler instruments. He never failed to warn me with that preliminary glance, and when the magic wand followed I gave him all I had. The little beggar was a hypnotist.

Towards the climax I could have sworn the whole orchestra was there. Klotz was playing superbly, and Norman was roaming from one instrument to the other with a remarkable combination of accuracy and imitative versatility. As for me, I supplied dynamic effects that would have satisfied even the great Beethoven, who once asked for guns.

Then it was over.

Herr Siegfried bowed twice to the audience, indicated his entire orchestra with an all-embracing wave of the baton, and ended by solemnly shaking hands with his father, who stood up to



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

accept the honor. After that, with a self-conscious wriggle, he became the boy once more, and removed his spell from us. With roars of delight we gathered about him, making a circle by joining hands, and dancing extempore, we sang a chorus consisting of constant repetitions of "Hilee-hilo! Hilee-hilo!" That may not be the correct spelling, but then we were singing, not writing it—which is one advantage music has over literature.

Before we went, Herr Klotz took us into the room where his wife lay ill, and by her eyes—for she was too weak to speak—she thanked us for our part in making the day a festival one for their lonely little household. With an instinctive gentleness that a woman might have shown, Norman spoke of the things she wanted to hear about: how her husband had been missed at the restaurant, of the desire of every one to make a little present to them, of the great future that lay before their son, and of the genius of Herr Klotz that would some day be recognized. With the cheeriest of good-byes, he lightly touched her shoulder with his hand and said he knew she would soon be well again.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

He lied. In half of what he said he lied. He was blowing bubbles that the woman stricken with fever might see in them some little compensation for her life of drudgery.

With the guttural good wishes of Herr Klotz still in our ears (we had pledged eternal friendship in three foaming mugs of beer), we sought the street, to find that dusk was settling over the city. For some moments neither spoke, but feeling that perhaps I had descended too abruptly from my pedestal, I cleared my throat and ventured on a remark.

"A decent fellow," I said patronizingly, and felt my dignity reasserting myself; but Norman failed to hear me. He was lost in some memory. Now that I look back, I wonder was it the picture of the sick woman he saw or his vision of the mother with her two sons; or, with his gift of intuition, could he see, less than a year ahead, Klotz, in a German soldier's uniform, marching through Belgium with an army of lust and rapine, gorged like gluttonous, venomous beasts?

I wonder.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

### VIII

It was from an aunt of mine that I first heard of Norman's attachment to Liliias Oxley.

Whenever I received a letter from my relative, I had first to realize that its mission was to educate, not to entertain. She was a woman of strong ideas, and, as my mother died very early in my life, she seldom lost an opportunity of impressing a moral—like the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*. In her correspondence, and to a large extent in her conversation, my aunt was given to dashes, underlines, and exclamation-marks. It is perhaps unnecessary to state that she was a single woman.

I received the letter two months after Christmas; it was dated from the Beacon at Hindhead.

“MY DEAR NEPHEW,—You will find mentholated crystals—carried in a small bottle—a splendid preventive against the present epidemic of cold in the head! Sniff a little every night before going to bed.

“When are you going to marry? For good-



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

ness' sake, marry a *dark* girl when you do. Our family is growing positively colorless!

"Your friend, Mr. Norman, is visiting the Oxleys down here. It seems young Oxley is trying to write a play with some ideas in it, and Norman thinks he can help him! Who in the world wants to see a play with *their* ideas! It's a pity you couldn't teach him to do something useful—Norman, I mean.—Young Oxley is going into the Church! Why doesn't he go to Canada! I mean *Norman*.

"Do you remember little Lillas Oxley? She had pneumonia last year, though I *warned* her mother about flannel soaked in goose-oil and turpentine! She always looked like a hothouse flower, and now she is simply *frail*. Of course, she's pretty and has eyes that always makes fools of the men—not that *that* signifies! Everybody says she's artistic, but all I ever hear her play is by some newfangled foreigner named Debussy, and it's all discord. She's only nineteen and looks sixteen.

"Of course, young Norman comes along, and instead of picking out some healthy *buxom* girl, he falls in love with this bit of tinsel china! It's

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

criminal, and should not be *allowed*. What kind of children will they have, if any! He calls her his *Beatrice*—Heaven knows why!

“They are together *constantly*. I would write to the *Times* about it if I thought that Lord Northfellow would publish it. We should have a Minister of *Eugenics*! Surely Winston Churchill would be better employed at that than trying to build up a huge navy we’ll never need! By the way, I see he’s taken to writing *novels* now!

“Do talk to young Norman! Tell him your uncle is doing very well with pigs in Canada; and why not induce your friend to go *there*, and get some *common-sense*, because every Canadian I meet has a head on his shoulders? It must be the climate!

“I am going to stay here for a month, and then visit my cousin in Scotland. She has six children. Whatever induced her to marry a minister? He has no money and no *prospects*—except more children, I suppose!

“Does that Mulvaney woman see that your room is kept aired? When you write you should have the window open and a cap on your head.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"I hope you will never write books! It is quite a *distinction* nowadays not to.

"Where did you go for Christmas?—Your loving aunt,

HANNAH.

"Feby. 8/1914."

The only way I can account for my aunt's love of exclamation-marks was her delight at seeing a sentence round to a good finish. I have known authors to be so overcome with the dramatic significance of their work that they put them in as a sort of public recognition thereof.

*En passant.* . . . I wonder why my aunt never wrote a serial story for one of the London dailies.

## IX

War.

Our world of artificiality lay like a cracked eggshell. As drowning men, we clutched at everything that seemed stable . . . to find nothing that was not made of perishable stuff. Our pens that had criticized so long mocked us as we gazed at the pages which seemed to reject our thoughts before we gave them life. A few of us



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

turned into special war writers and comforted the nation with statistics. We showed that Germany was beaten—it was a mathematical truth that could be proved. While we demonstrated our immense superiority to the enemy in figures, a little British Army was fighting against odds of six to one.

And the Fates stood by with poised shears, ready to cut the thread of Britain's destiny.

It is not pleasant to recall the arraignment of the year 1914. The Boer War had shown our weakness to every nation but ourselves; our educated men had graduated into the world using their abilities as obstructionists. We had discouraged everything that had the very odor of progress.

Yet—we muddled through. Men still use that word as if it were something creditable instead of hideous. We won, because, behind the Britain that muddled and obstructed, there was the Britain of noble mothers and noble sons.

And into the first winter our orgy of statistics went on, like an endless Babylonian feast . . . while the British fleet—which we should never need—strained and plunged in the icy gales of

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

the North Sea, grimly, silently, saving the world for Civilization.

Great days. Fateful days. Terrible days.

One Friday night early in December I received a note from Norman, asking me to meet him for dinner at "Arcadia." I had not seen him for six months, but his debonair charm was as potent as ever, and we chatted of the past like friends who had not met for years. As if by mutual consent, we avoided the present until I noticed that the orchestra was different.

"Where is Klotz?" I asked suddenly.

"Gone."

"Where?"

"To the war. He was a German reservist and got away."

"And his wife?"

"She is confined to her bed all the time, but fortunately there is an excellent woman looking after her and young Siegfried. By the way, what a conductor he'll make some day!"

By the subterfuge I knew who was paying for the woman, though his income was always slender. Stimulated by a British-born orchestra that played with a respectability beyond question, we

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

pursued bubbles of conversation for half-an-hour, saying many clever things and arriving at no conclusions; but both of us knew that, behind the badinage, there was the consciousness of war gripping our brains like a fever.

"What do you think," I said at last, "of the question of enlisting?" It would have been a mockery to deny the fever any longer.

"Why should I enlist?" His smile was so disarming that I regretted my move at once.

"Don't misunderstand me," I said hastily. "You are not needed, and you never will be. Besides——" My voice trailed off into the insincere platitudes that always come to the lips when conscience is to be drugged.

He lit a cigarette. "Pest," he said, "most men are participants in life; a few, like myself, are onlookers. It was my choice when I was a mere youngster—wisely or not, I do not know—but the pose has become reality now. I am a jester at the court of the world, a wordy fellow with a touch of melancholy in his humor, watching and commenting on the real things of life. Before there was a war I blew bubbles, and now I am fit for nothing else. Have a cigarette?"



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Thanks.”

He passed his hand across his brow with the same weariness I had noticed before.

“To gaze on life,” he went on after a pause, “and not to live it, spares one many sorrows. Even love, which comes to most men as an overwhelming passion, stole into my life like a perfume of Cashmere. When I was twelve years of age and living on the south coast, I used to pass a little dream-girl of seven years or so. The purity of her face stayed with me like a melody a mother sings to her child. Then she was ill, and for three weeks I never saw her. Finally she came one day in a chair, and her beauty was the most exquisite thing I had ever seen. It made me think that the God who gave us this beautiful world sometimes cherishes a soul as sweet as hers and keeps it in a body that is frail, so that through life He can watch it like a flower, tenderly, lovingly; . . . and when He wants it back again He has but to whisper, and, like a violet bending to a summer breeze, it hears and obeys. . . . I have sometimes thought that even tears shed for such a one have in them the quality

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

of dew, and serve to keep the memory green and pleasant.

"The next day I brought her a rose. Though we had never spoken, she took it, and gave me her face to kiss. . . . I lost my mother when I was very young, but this dream-girl's kiss supplied that inspiration for the ideal that a child takes from its mother. I could not have been impure after that—I could not have been unkind. The next day she was gone, and I never saw her again until I went to Surrey to visit young Oxley. She was his sister."

"And you found?"

"That the dream-child had become a woman—the charm of Spring had softened to the witchery of Summer."

He shrugged his shoulders and relit his cigarette, which had gone out.

"That, my dear Pest, is how love came to me."

I frowned in an endeavor to pierce his apparently superficial dismissal of the subject.

"Don't you intend to marry her?" I said.

"Marry her?" He laughed, but there was little mirth in the sound. "Does a jester marry?" His eyes hardened, and there was a new ring to

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

his voice. "Who am I to take a wife? A *poseur*, a *flâneur*, in a world of men, I stand discredited beside the poorest workman whose toil brings in a pittance for his wife and kiddies. England is calling for men—for men, I say." He brought his fist with a crash on the table. "What can I offer her—my parlor accomplishments? My minstrel's mummary that shudders at the sight of a sword? Can I blow bubbles in a world where hearts are breaking?"

There were tears in his voice, but his eyes were flashing furiously.

"Hexcuse me." A man had stepped up to us, wearing the armlet of a recruit. His face was oddly familiar, but I could not recall it until a light was switched on just behind him, and I recognized the pumpkin-faced man of Christmas Eve.

"I just thought of 'ow I'd like for to tell you as I've been took for the Army O.K."

We shook his hand and wished him the best of luck.

"Funny thing, sir, as 'ow the 'ole bloomin' time I was planning to sign hup I was a-thinkin' of you and that there fiddle. 'You wouldn't like



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

to meet 'im,' I kind o' sez to myself, 'and you not in the harmy, you wouldn't,' I sez."

"Instead of which," smiled Norman, all trace of his intensity gone, "I am the one who is the slacker."

"But didn't I see you in the line the day we was going for to join hup?"

Norman laughed. "I was probably a hundred miles away," he said. "Pest, have I a double?"

The recruit scratched his head. "I could 'a sworn hit was you," he said, and launched into a graphic description of drill and the absurdities thereof, a recital which appeared to have no prospect of an ending until we were interrupted by the restaurant proprietor, who took Norman to one side for a consultation concerning the medieval cook.

I felt a hand on my arm and turned to see our friend of the pumpkin face making secret and terrifying signs for me to lend him my ear.

"'E's a-'iding something," he whispered hoarsely. "I ain't been a chandlery merchant hall my life, wot does most o' 'is business hon tick, without hit learning me to remember faces. Hit *were* 'im. 'E was turned down for a bad 'eart!"

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Whereupon he made a semi-mystic sign with his thumb and forefinger to indicate that the whole affair was a secret between gentlemen.

That night, in bed, the sensitive, delicate features of Basil Norman remained in my memory. I had surprised his secret which he would admit to no one; not to the girl he loved; not to himself. It was the same spirit that had made him defy the whole of Westminster. We had called him Puck and the Blower of Bubbles, and he himself had said he was lighter than air. . . . But Basil Norman's life had been one endless battle with an indomitable soul that refused to yield to the body.

I could not sleep well that night.

## X

I did not meet Basil Norman for nearly four years. I joined the Artists' Rifles early in 1915, fought for eleven months, and was given a commission. After a short time in England I went out in all the glory of a Sam Browne and one star, but in a few months I was wounded in the chest, which earned me Blighty and a surfeit of

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Aunt Hannah, who still contended that had we only concentrated on an *army* instead of a *navy*——

As I write, it all seems a blurred memory of colorless monotony, mud, fatigue, death, and grim humor. In January, 1918, after a term of duty as musketry instructor, I returned to France, and fought through the horrible spring battles until, with cruel coincidence, I was wounded again in the same place, and once more came to England with a bullet in my chest—a bullet they dared not extract. In September I was discharged.

One morning in November I sat by the fire in my den at Sloane Square. I had resumed the tenancy of the rooms, and Mrs. Mulvaney looked upon me as being even less mature than before, warning me about goloshes when it was wet, and umbrellas when it wasn't, but appeared likely to be.

How long I sat there I do not know, but memory began to weave its spell, driving my surroundings into a dim obscurity and bringing back incidents of the past with vivid clarity. I gripped my head with both hands, and, for the hundredth



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

time, sought the truth that lay buried in the holocaust of the nations. . . . My wound hurt again, and a dizziness crept over me like a fog that rises from the sea and enshrouds the land.

Futile. . . . Futile. . . .

Had some one spoken? The words sounded distinctly. . . . I could have sworn I heard them.

Was the whole war a dream, or was it real? Once more I was in Sloane Square; there was my desk with its litter of papers, my pipe-rack, my books. . . . Had I ever left them? Could it be true that I had led men against machine-gun fire—and that I had killed? Were those boys who died beside me, smiling like children in their sleep, really dead? Was it all some hideous fantasy of an unhealthy brain—a gigantic charade invented by the greatest buffoon of all time?

Futile. . . . Futile. . . . Futile.

I cursed, and pressed my brow with my hands. It was a fight for sanity, as so many men have fought in the solitude of their rooms since the hell of Flanders.

Like a panorama the events of the war crossed my mind, and yet those that stood out most clearly were the unimportant things that came as mere

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

incidents during the unfolding of the world's destiny. The senior chaplain's dog, which was shot by an A.P.M. and mourned by a whole division . . . the new arrival who thought he was a special charge of the Lord's, and who persisted in looking over the top during the day—we buried him next morning . . . the night that the female impersonator from a divisional concert-party lured the colonel into amorous confession . . . the little chap who got no mail at Christmas, and said he hadn't received a letter for two years . . . one after the other these human trivialities coursed through my brain, forcing the vaster issues aside.

From no apparent cause, the strain of reminiscence turned toward Basil Norman. I had seen him somewhere, but whether in London or in the country my poor tired brain seemed unable to determine. And then, with no regard for relevancy, I was with my battalion once more, marching with the Australians to hold a strategical point that one of our brigades had saved from the disaster of March. Who was it said that the Australians lacked discipline? Look at them grinning like youngsters at a game, with the odds

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

against any coming out alive! Discipline? Hell!

We rested at a cross-roads and smoked; one of our Tommies was singing the refrain of a song that urged the country to call up all his relations, even his father and his mother, but "for Gawd's sake" not to take him. The sublime incongruity of it was so thoroughly British that we laughed and called for a repetition. A few minutes later the Australians passed us, going forward, and there was a reckless air of bravado about them that boded ill for the Hun.

We waited an hour, two hours—perhaps more.

By Jove! Coming around the bend in the road was the brigade that had held the line. Good work, you chaps! Well done! Bravo! That's it, you fellows; give them a cheer! Beneath the mud and the dust and the beards, they were livid with fatigue; the skin beneath their eyes had dropped, and their jaws hung impotently, like those of idiots. There wasn't a sound from their ranks as, too weary to lift them, they dragged their feet through the dust of the road. They had held their position for fifty-six hours, attacked incessantly from three sides by overwhelming



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

numbers. Damned good, you fellows; damned good!

Still buffeted by imagination, my memory of the scene seemed to fade; yet one impression lingered that was both livid and blurred. It was when that brigade, or what was left of it, had almost passed, and we were tightening up the straps of our kits, that I caught a glimpse of his face, or that of a man who could have passed as his twin. The soldier beside him was limping painfully and leaning on him heavily in an endeavor to keep up, and beneath the grimy pallor of that face I could see the old wistful, whimsical smile. . . . I tried to cry out, but something stuck in my throat, and next moment we were falling in.

It was Basil Norman, and the lame soldier beside him was the man with a face like a pumpkin. Either that or my brain had become the plaything of fancy.

Again my memory became a blank, and for a few minutes everything seemed obscured. Some one was shouting! It was taken up by another, then by many—the whole air was filled with noise. . . . I heard a woman's voice. Good God!

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Had the Germans broken through? . . . "*Steady, men—get your aim first.*" . . . The shouting grew in intensity, and I pressed my brow with my hands until the marks stood out like wounds. With a cry as of an animal in pain, I rose to my feet and shook the shadows from my eyes. There was my room—the smoldering fire—my chair . . . but the shouting—it was louder than before.

Feeling my reason tottering, I crossed to the window and threw it open. People were running, and crying some word as they ran; one woman wept openly, and no one heeded her; a taxi passed crowded to the roof with hatless, gesticulating enthusiasts. Was the whole world mad? From every direction came the noise of deep-throated shouting, swelling into a vast *Te Deum* of sound. A soldier with one foot leaned against a lamp-post and rested his muscles from their labor with the crutches.

"Hello!" I cried. The khaki seemed to restore my grip on things. "I say—hello!"

He turned round and hobbled over to my window. "Wot's the trouble?" he said.

"This shouting," I cried; "these people running like rabbits. What does it all mean?"

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Wot! don’t you know?” He smacked his lips in appreciation of the surprise he had in store for me. “Why, Fritz ’as took the count, ’e ’as.”

“Then,——” Confound it; what made my lips quiver so? “Then—it’s peace? . . . You mean . . . it’s peace?”

He nodded half-a-dozen times. “The war,” he said, feeling the importance of his declaration, “is napoo. Kaiser Bill ’as ’opped the twig, and the hold firm of ’im and Gott is for sale, with the goodwill thrown in, I *don’t* think.”

I leaned out of the window, and we grasped hands.

Futile. . . . Futile. . . . Futile.

No—by Heaven, no! Not while we remember our dead; not while the spirit of comradeship still lives in the breasts of those who went out there; never, if the Britain of the future is worthy of her knights of the greatest crusade of all, and of the mothers who gave that which had sprung from their very heart-beats.

*“Out of sorrow have the worlds been built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain.”*

Half-mad with joy, I rushed into the street and urged my hospitality on the mutilated soldier,



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

who came into my den and took a seat by the fire, while I fetched a decanter and cigars that we might make the occasion a jovial one. As I came into the room I noticed that he was examining me curiously.

"Hexcuse me," he said, "but if I may make so bold—wasn't you 'is pal?"

"Good heavens!" I cried, a light bursting upon me. "You're the man with a face like a—like a——" I suppose I blushed.

"Don't 'esitate," he grinned. "Many a time over there 'e told me you called me 'Pumpkin-Fice,' and, beggin' your pardon, sir, I likes it a sight better than 'Pest.' "

"Then—it was Norman I saw in March?"

"Ay." He sipped his glass meditatively. "'E lied about 'is 'eart, and was took O.K. late in 'fifteen. 'E was a ranker like the rest of us, but 'e was a proper gentleman, 'e was—that is, not just like we hunderstands the word in Hengland, but a *real* gentleman. 'E never preached and 'e never whined, but them two heyes just kept twinklin', and whenever hany of us was a bit windy, 'e 'd sort of buck us hup by that there smile 'e 'ad. I ain't much on langwidge, not

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

'avin' no eddication to speak of, or I'd hexplain better; but when little Sawyers got 'is from a sniper, and 'e knew 'is ticket was punched for to go West, the sergeant says, 'Fetch the padre,' but Sawyers 'e says, 'No, it's Bubbles I want.' . . . I ain't much on religion neither, and I've done a 'eap o' filthy swearin', which I guess is all down agin me in the book; but wherever Bubbles is goin' is good enough for me, whether it's brimstin and blazes or hangels playin' 'arps."

"Tell me"—I dreaded the answer to the question—"where is he now?"

"'E's took a cottage hover in the Hisle o' Wight," he said, clearing his throat and speaking slowly, "and 'e's married to the sweetest creetur I ever saw houtside a book. Blime! after I gets hout o' 'ospital, me not 'avin' any hold woman of my own, 'e finds me hout and sends a letter sayin' to go there for my convalessings, which likewise I did. That's 'is haddress on the top of that there letter."

I took the paper from his hand, but kept my eyes on his face; he was keeping something from me. "Tell me the truth about him," I said, and waited,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

He shifted uneasily in his chair. "E got a blighty near 'is 'eart," he said, making a supreme effort, "and 'e'll never get hup from 'is chair no more."

### XI

The packet for the Isle of Wight threaded its way through the traffic of incoming vessels, and ran by a cruiser that had just come from the bloodless Trafalgar of German shame, where the second navy of the world surrendered without a fight.

A man next to me grunted. "It's all right for us to crow," he said; "but Germany was beaten, and she did the right thing."

I looked at him—he was quite sincere. His hair was unduly long, and he carried a manuscript case—probably one of the statistical writers still going strong.

"In your wildest flights of imagination," I said, "even if the combined fleets of the world were against him, could you picture Beatty leading the British Navy out to surrender?"

"Supposing he were ordered?"

As if in answer to his question, our course took



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

us by the hull of the *Victory*, straining at her moorings in the November wind.

“In that case,” I said, “Beatty would have had two blind eyes.”

Which was the sum total of our conversation until we landed at Ryde, when our paths diverged, never, I hope, to meet again. Probably, over the week-end, he was polishing up some powerful articles on the absurdity of Reconstruction.

By the time the train had reached the little station of St. Louis, just beyond Ventnor, the wind had blown away any clouds, and the sun was shining radiantly. As I emerged from my carriage I felt a throb of exhilaration shoot through my veins, but depart as quickly as it had come, when I realized how near was the tragedy which I had soon to witness. I heard my name spoken, and, turning, saw a ruddy-faced, storm-blown fellow of fifty odd years, whose whole bearing smacked of nor'-westers and mizzen-tops. When I admitted to my name, he seized my bag without a word, and started down the road with the swaying motion peculiar to mariners.

We had hardly gone any distance, when he

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

stopped at a gate which proved to be the back entrance to a garden, and following him through it, I was led along a path which was strewn with leaves in all the wealth of autumnal coloring, while through the trees there was the deep blue of the sea, flecked with crests of foam. We had gone about fifty yards when we came upon a cottage, in front of which, on a promontory, was a neatly trimmed lawn, guarded by six trees that stood like sentinels. The lower branches had been cut to give a better view, and their appearance lent a quaintly tropical look to the place, as if they were palms. In front of the house, fields sloped gradually to the edge of the cliff, which overlooked the sea beneath.

“My dear old Pest!”

Against the background of trees I had failed to notice him sitting in an invalid's chair. In three strides I was by his side, his hands in mine . . . but no words came to my faltering lips. For a moment the gray of his eyes softened to a look of understanding; then the old smile, just as charming as ever, irradiated his face.

“This is an event,” he said, “to be entered in the log.—Sindbad!”

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

The ex-seaman who had acted as my guide pulled at his forelock.

“Ay, ay, cap’n!”

“Take this gentleman’s things to the guest-room upstairs.”

“The cabin to starboard? Werry good, cap’n.”

Heavens! such a voice! There were fog, gale, piracy, rum, and combat in it.

“Sindbad,” said Norman, in answer to my look, “is one of my indiscretions—like ‘Arcadia.’ He turned up here one day with such a tale of the sea as would have shamed Robert Louis Stevenson at his best. So far as I can discover, he has been in every naval fight since Aboukir Bay. He’s a bit hazy on the Jutland scrap, but hints darkly at the possibility of an invasion by Spain. He is convinced that the *Armada* is only hiding and waiting its time.”

In spite of myself, I laughed.

“As he refused to go, I decided to employ him as a man-of-all-work, and, as he appeared to have forgotten his own name, I gave him that of ‘Sindbad,’ which pleased him as much as me. As a result of my engaging him, the lawn you stand on is the quarter-deck which he never fails to



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

salute. As nearly as I can discover, we are sailing a perpetual voyage—you see by this view that the illusion is possible—and we're living in the imminent danger and hope of an attack by the Spanish. By the way, old man, would you rather go upstairs and clean up? Are you cold sitting there? Sometimes, being so comfortable myself, I forget all about my guests."

I protested, sincerely, that I was quite contented where I was.

"Good!" he smiled. "Now tell me all about London. . . . I see you were hit twice. From more than a dozen sources I've heard how splendid you were in France."

His voice was so bright, with its old, happy mannerism of rapidity of words, with the occasional slurring rallentando, and his gaiety so infectious, that, under his influence, I felt the clouds about my brain lifting—not only those caused by grief for his helpless condition, but those born of my own black moods which drove sleep from my eyes for nights at a time. I had come determined to be cheerful and to bring encouragement to the invalid, but already I was drinking in the elixir of his spirit and feeling

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

my arteries throb with a kind of ecstasy. His charm was more potent than before.

For a few minutes we chatted about France and the old Westminster boys who had won renown. We talked of many things, and laughed to find that we were still boys.

“By the way,” he said, during a momentary lull in the stream of reminiscence, “I must apologize for my wife. She is doing some necessary shopping in Ventnor, but will be back by the next train.”

“I heard you were married,” I said, but got no further. Delicacy forbade my asking him how his dream of love had become a reality. He must have read the question in my eyes, however, for he offered me his cigarettes, which, with him, was always a prelude to a change in the tone of conversation.

“I did not write to her after I went to France,” he said quietly, “because . . . well, I’ve spoken to you before of my sense of intuition—and I knew that mine would be a heavy price to pay. It was not fair to fasten her with a life none too robust at its best, because of a love-fantasy between two children. When I was hit,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and they broke the news to me that—that this was to be my luck, the one thing that comforted me was the thought that she was free and would not have to share my captivity. By-the-by, Pest, isn't the sea fascinating? It is never the same for two days together."

He was still a Puck, lightening his moods whenever they threatened to hurt the listener with their intensity.

"Pest," he said, after a pause, "she came to me. . . . When everything was dark, and I was groping blindly for some hand that would start me just a—a little on my path, she came—out of the mists. I urged her to leave me. I argued that she was not fair—and for answer she kissed me. . . . Pest, it was a moment of such exquisite happiness, a happiness so poignant, that I wish I could have died then. I was never so fit for heaven."

The figure of Sindbad appeared from the house, tugged at its forelock, and disappeared into the garden to trim some shrubs.

"How did you happen to come here?" I asked.

"I had always looked on the island," he said, smiling, "as the only spot in England where a



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

twentieth-century Robinson Crusoe could find a sanctuary from the world, and, by the courtesy of the gentleman who owned the place, I was able to purchase it at a ridiculously low price. As a matter of fact, he was offered twice the amount quoted to me, but refused because I was a disabled Tommy. We came here strangers, but really the kindness of every one is so great that the ordeal is turning into a privilege. You have no idea, Pest, how extraordinarily sympathetic and courteous these people are."

"I suppose, though," I said softly, "that it is rather—lonely."

"Lonely?" he laughed. "Bless your heart, old boy! talk about a French savant and his *salon*—this place is a positive Mecca for all the distinguished pilgrims on the island. For instance, there is the editor of the *Tribune*—a man who thinks editorially and talks colossally. He claims that any one who has read Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and Carlyle's *French Revolution* is educated. He never reads anything else, but keeps on reading these three in an endless cycle. We have perfectly stupendous arguments that never get anywhere,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

but utterly exhaust both of us. Then there's the station-master. How many passengers boarded the train here when you were coming off?"

"Four, I think."

"Ah, yes; this is Saturday—a busy day. Some trains we don't get any, and others just one or two; but in anticipation of a rush at some future date, he's invented a scheme of getting tickets out of a drawer, stamped and all complete, by merely pressing a button. I assure you it's going to revolutionize the booking systems of the world—we've been working on it for weeks, but so far all we've got is the button. The plans are prodigious, though. And the Tommies! Gor blime, Pest! there's a convalescent home just down the road, and it's a queer day that at least two of the beggars don't come up for a 'jaw' about old times. You talk about your officers' messes and brass hats; why, it's real life in the ranks. I tell you, Pest, I would rather be the man that coined the word 'Cheerio' than the greatest general the world has seen."

A merchant-ship, still wearing its strange motley of camouflage, sailed past only a couple of miles from shore.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"Look!" whispered Norman, and pointed down the garden.

Sindbad was crouched behind some bushes, surveying the vessel through a dilapidated telescope. After a careful scrutiny, he resumed his labors, shaking his head and muttering darkly to himself.

Norman chuckled hilariously. "He's on the look-out for Spaniards," he said.

"What a villainous telescope!"

"Isn't it? He always has it by him, though. I'll swear you can't see half-a-mile with the blessed thing."

A huge black hound appeared from the direction of the conservatory, and, after the canine manner, expressed his wriggliest delight at the sight of Norman, ending by sitting solemnly beside the chair and laying one paw on the invalid's knee.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Jones," said Norman.

The dog thumped the ground four times with his tail, and emitted a yawn like the sound of a train emerging from a tunnel.

"Mr. Jones," said I, "changes from cordiality to ennui with rather startling rapidity."



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

The hound acknowledged his name by a solitary thump, and then groaned with the air of a Stiggins contemplating the wickedness of a Weller.

“What breed is he?” I asked.

“Dog—just dog. He is, if I may say so, the battle-ground of his ancestors. Every breed but that of bull can be traced in him, and each has its moment of ascendancy. Mr. Jones possesses a most remarkable hereditary system.”

The subject of our conversation became suddenly tense. A bird had hopped on to the quarter-deck, and was pecking at the ground in a manner that would infuriate any self-respecting dog.

Gathering up his loins, Mr. Jones stalked the intruder to within four yards, and then fell in a heap on the spot—where the bird had been. After surveying the landscape with a puzzled air, as if to indicate to us that foul work was afloat, he walked to the end of the lawn and gazed thoughtfully at the sea. Having thoroughly demonstrated his indifference as to whether he ever caught a bird or not, he yawned terrifically, and left the scene for the comfort of the kitchen.

XII

And so, partly with banter, but with many moments that were tense with feeling, we talked while the afternoon wore on. Norman was in the midst of some anecdote of either Sindbad or Mr. Jones, when he paused, and a look of delighted anticipation lit his countenance.

"That's the whistle," he said. "The train's right on time to-day." He sighed happily, as a lover about to meet his sweetheart after a long absence.

"Sindbad," he cried, "pipe all hands to tea. Tell Mrs. M'Gillicuddy we'll have it in the music-room."

Telescope under his arm, the worthy buccaneer—for I am convinced he sailed under Captain Kidd—shuffled into the house, and the noise of the train could be distinctly heard as it emptied its crowd of one or two at the little station.

"I shall go and open the gate," I said, but he stopped me.

"He is with her, Pest."

"Who?"

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Wait. . . . I have kept a surprise for you.”

A minute later I saw his wife at the end of the path as she waved to him. She came through the leafy garden with a grace of movement that made the scene a delicate, colorful picture, and even before she had reached us I could see that her beauty was as exquisite, as perfect, as an orchid's. All sacrificed to an invalid. . . .

With the tenderest of smiles in her eyes, which were blue as the sky, she advanced towards us and kissed him; and I, who detest things sentimental as I would the plague, thought it was the loveliest tribute I had ever seen. Before he could speak, she turned and gave me both her hands.

“I won't apologize,” she said, and her voice was as sweet as a brook's, “because I know you both enjoyed your talk of old times the better for my absence.”

“It was a wonderful afternoon,” I said, “but it would have been doubly so with you here.”

And then I, the Pest, the cynic, the modernist, stooped and kissed her hand. It seemed the natural thing to do, and she accepted it with the understanding heart that Nature had given her.

“But, Liliás, where is the lad?”



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"Oh," she laughed gaily, "the station-master kept him a moment to show him an entirely new button he had thought of. But here he is now."

Coming up the path, carrying a couple of parcels, was a boy of, perhaps, ten years of age. His hair was golden and curly, and his eyes had a dreamy look that contrasted strangely with the strength of his chin. He had the poise and the appearance of a thoughtful, well-bred youth; but there was something, I could not say what, that told me he was not English.

He touched his cap to me as he came on the lawn and smiled cordially to Basil.

"Do you remember the gentleman?" asked Norman.

The boy shook his head and unconsciously moved nearer to the woman, who placed her hand on his shoulder.

"You shouldn't forget each other," laughed Norman, "for once he played the drums under your baton."

A few minutes later we went in for tea, the boy and Mrs. Norman going first. I waited while Sindbad prepared to move the invalid, and then turned to him for an explanation.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Klotz was killed,” said Norman swiftly, “and his wife died a month later, after she heard of his death. We have adopted Siegfried as our ward.”

### XIII

That night a storm came up from the sea, and the house rattled and shook in the clutch of a November gale. The trees that looked like palms swayed and bent before the wind, and the many-colored leaves in the garden fled like refugees before an attack, and covered the ground with their quivering bodies.

We were gathered in the music-room, the cosy warmth from a fire of logs making pleasant contrast to the snarling wind outside. The evening had been a memorable one. The woman whose beauty was so delicate had charmed us with her voice, her playing; charmed us without effort or knowing how.

From a lounge, Norman's vivacity, which always had in it the quality of sympathy, illuminated everything that happened. When she sang a little extract of the eighteenth century, “*Bergère Légère*,” it was he who knew that it had been

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

a favorite of Marie Antoinette's. When she played the love theme which Puccini gives the strings in the first act of *Madame Butterfly*, it was Norman who, by a dozen deftly chosen words, created the atmosphere of Japan and brought before us the cruel tenderness of Pinkerton's love for Cho Cho San. After Siegfried had played MacDowell's conception of "Mid-ocean," Norman recalled in a moment the genius of America's greatest composer, the genius that had finally crossed the thin barrier to insanity. From that we talked of the sea, while the wind howled outside, and I spoke of the many moods of blue that colored it in a single day, and, without giving the effect of quotation or of monologue, he brought his artistry into play with three lines of Keats's sonnet "Blue."

Whenever any of us spoke, his sensitive rhythmic intellectuality seemed to hover about us, acknowledging thought where it struggled to the surface, adding some subtle touch of color when our efforts seemed too drab. Under its influence we talked our best, we thought our best, we were our best.



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

At nine o'clock Siegfried rose to go to bed, and advanced to shake hands with me.

"Well," I said, "and do you still intend to be a conductor?"

He smiled a little self-consciously.

"There is much to learn," he said, "and—I do not want to leave my home."

Norman lit a cigarette—his old mannerism when emotions were taut.

"Parents," he said, "and quasi-parents like us, march straight towards loneliness. Our greatest concern is to have our children ready to leave us as soon as they hear the call of the world, knowing that such a moment will be the proudest and the saddest of our lives."

"Good-night," said Siegfried to me. "Good-night, Uncle Bubbles." He turned wistfully to Mrs. Norman, who smiled and linked her arm in his.

"Won't you come along?" she said to me. "Siegfried is very proud of his room, and would like you to see it." It was her way of hiding her knowledge that the little chap was frightened by the storm. So we saw him safely in bed, and admired his books, and wished him pleasant dreams.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

We had just left his room and were about to descend the stairs, when we paused as the sound of rain beating against the house came to our ears. We hurried about for a few moments seeing that all windows were closed, and were going to rejoin Norman, when I stopped her.

"Mrs. Norman," I said haltingly, "it is never easy for an Englishman to express the emotion he feels, but may I tell you how touched I am by your devotion to your husband? Without you, his life would be—unbearable."

She did not smile or protest, but her eyes looked straight into mine.

"To live day by day," she said slowly, her fingers playing with a necklace that hung about her full white throat, "near a soul like Basil's, to commune with a brain like his . . . to feel the inspiration of his nature that is so in tune with the beauty of the world, is a happiness few women can experience. If it were not too cruel, I could feel thankful for his wound that has given him so completely to me."

I stood by her on the creaking stairs as the rain swept in torrents against the house, and her

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

murmuring tones mingled with the sounds of the storm.

“Perhaps you cannot understand,” she said gently, “but loving Basil as I do, and having him dependent on me, is a selfish happiness that only a woman could really know.”

And out of the night a truth came to me that, though it never, never could be mine, the most precious thing in this world is a woman’s heart.

### XIV

It was eleven o’clock, and Basil Norman and I were alone. The storm had subsided, and, through the sound of the rain, we could hear the waves breaking against the shore.

“I do not want Siegfried to go to school yet,” he was saying; “he is so full of promise and latent genius that I dread the risk of having it all standardized into what we call a public-school man. I am coaching him in languages and the three R’s, but more than anything else I want him to form his own conception of the scheme of the universe, so that when he takes his position among the world’s musicians—as I am confident



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

he will—he'll have the echo of what he interprets in his own breast. Music is so vast, yet musicians, as a class, are people of little depth."

"Has the lad a chance in England with his German name?"

"Yes. England must realize that genius has no nationality."

"What was Siegfried like when you took him first?"

"He was arrogant, sullen, and in his child's brain was the knowledge that his father had fought against us. To make him forget his unhappy past, and partly to satisfy a caprice of my own, I—well, you would say I blew bubbles. We invented a little city of make-believe. From the hill at the back of the house you can look down on all these houses, and at dusk, when the mist rises from the sea and the windows begin to glow with light, it is quaint enough for a study by Rackham. In our little City of Bubbles there dwelt such celebrities as Aladdin, Jack the Giant Killer, Midshipman Easy, Peter Pan, poor Wilde's Happy Prince, and Heaven knows how many more. They were very real to Siegfried and me, and Lilius used to have many a laugh

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

over the troubles of our little family. But I had not counted on Sindbad; he was filling Siegfried with stories of buried treasure and men forced to walk the plank (all of them absolutely authenticated by the narrator), and the lurking Prussian began to appear. He stole down to Ventnor and bought books on the war . . . he began to glory in the stand Germany was making. So I was not surprised when, one day, he suggested that we should play soldiers.

“Pest, you should have been there. Siegfried was Napoleon, and I was Hindendorff, his chief of Staff. Sindbad was given command of a naval brigade, and was also in charge of a large fleet lying in hiding to cope with the Spaniard, should he emerge. In addition to these modest duties, he had to wheel my chair. Liliias came along as a composite representative of all the women’s services. Napoleon’s plans were that we should attack the City of Bubbles, which was being defended by a heavy force on the fringe of the hill. I omitted to mention our flying cavalry in the person of Mr. Jones; but owing to a misunderstanding of our objective he waged separate war on birds all afternoon, inflicting no casual-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

ties, but covering an immense area of ground. We began the attack about half-a-mile back; but when Napoleon ordered Sindbad's naval brigade into action, we were unable to find him, until Mr. Jones discovered him behind a rock, scrutinizing a passing merchantman through the inevitable telescope. After some persuasion, we induced Sindbad to attack, but half-way to his objective he remembered that he had left his pipe in the kitchen, to which he repaired, leaving his troops in the air, as we used to say in France, and taking away the mobility which, as Chief of Staff, I needed urgently. There is no question that Sindbad possesses imagination, but it is an unreliable one.

"To make the story short, we won by a brilliant ruse of Napoleon's, who got word to the enemy that the tuck-shops in Ventnor were being evacuated, which was as effective as his famous "*Sauve qui peut*" at Waterloo, for they fled ignominiously, and we captured the city, after inflicting heavy casualties."

I looked at him and waited. Behind the nonsense I could see some serious thought was lurking, but what I could not conjecture.



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“The next day,” he resumed, “Siegfried was tired, and asked me to tell how Peter Pan frustrated the pirates. ‘Peter is dead,’ said I. Siegfried suppressed a sob, and asked when he died. ‘He was killed in our attack,’ I said. After a long pause, he mentioned the probability of Mr. Midshipman Easy being at home. ‘He is dead,’ said I. Again his question, and again my answer: ‘He was killed in our attack.’ He went out; but on going to bed that night he asked if Cinderella was really very pretty. ‘Not now,’ I said, ‘for she is lying dead.’ Does it seem ludicrous, Pest? That night he cried himself to sleep, and it is not easy to listen to a youngster’s sobs when you know that a word from you will do away with them. For two long dreary weeks our City of Bubbles was a City of the Dead. . . . Then I suggested that we play soldiers again and make another attack. After all, Pest, it isn’t every Tommy gets a chance of being Chief of Staff. I wish you could have seen his face. It was as though I had struck him with a whip, and he left me without a word. That afternoon the Wizard of Oz visited our city and brought them all back to life. That was some months ago,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and our little dream-world is only a serio-humorous memory for Siegfried and me now. But during that night he cried himself to sleep I think the Prussian in him died."

For several minutes we listened to the rain.

"The greatest of the Arts," said Norman, very slowly, "is life. I don't think our writers, our painters, our men who dream in bronze realize that. If they did, it would not be said that the English are the least artistic people in the world; for you and I know that is not true. Scott going to his death in the Antarctic snow was a great artist. The sailor standing to one side when the last boat is filled, and those six Tommies at Grieswald in Germany, holding their ground against a row of bayonets and taking a sentence of two years' imprisonment rather than aid the Hun in making munitions—are they not artists? Where we fail as a race is in our authors, composers, painters, who divorce themselves from the real spirit of England and wonder that the products of their brains quicken no pulse and stir no imagination. Our educationists, our leaders in every movement allied with culture, have too often striven to choke the imaginativeness and

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

blind the eyes of our youth to the beauty of life, which is one of its greatest truths. One has but to read the despairing lines written by bereaved mothers for their sons who have fallen, to feel the sorrow of England crying for expression; instead of which, our triumph, our courage, our artistry are mute and inarticulate."

The rain had ceased, and the wind was moaning over the sea as if it had been balked of its prey.

"Mark my words, Pest," he said dreamily, "as a nation we shall have no self-expression until our artists take for their model the greatest of all Arts—*Life*."

His eyes were fixed on the smouldering coals, and over his face there was a mystic veil—a thing not of this world but born of the undying spirit. It was like a mist that settles on a river in the hour between sunset and night.

"Basil," I cried; and the sound of my own voice startled me. I do not know what words were surging to my lips, for he turned to me and the smile of compassion in his eyes held me silent.

Something choked in my throat. . . . I felt that I wanted to struggle to my feet and stand



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

at the salute. For the face that looked into mine was that of a CONQUEROR.

A burning ember fell from the grate and lay on the tiled surface of the hearth.

## PETITE SIMUNDE

### I

**T**HREE hundred miles north of Toronto, the Cobalt mining country surrenders its daily toll of silver to the world. In that region there is mostly rock. Where woods exist, the trees are gaunt and defiant, as though resentful of the approach of man; in winter they stand like white-shrouded ghosts, and the wind howls dismally through them until in the little settlements across Lake Timiskaming men draw closer to the fire, and women croon comfort to frightened children, yet half-believe, themselves, the Indian legend that another soul is on its way to the Great Unknown.

Five miles north of Cobalt the town of Haileybury straggles down a hill to the lake, on the other side of which can be seen the blue shores of Pontiac, Quebec, where lies the sleepy little

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

hamlet known as Ville Marie, possessed of its church, its wayside public-house, "Les Voyageurs," and a few vagabond frame buildings. The ring of the blacksmith's anvil can be heard throughout the day, for there is little else to drown the noise. But when the lumber-jacks come in from the woods, or the river-runners from their convoys of logs, there is always the sound of a noisy chorus from "Les Voyageurs," led (in the times we write of) by Pierre Generaud, who knows that singing a constant fortissimo stimulates thirst in participants and auditors alike. On Sunday there is the sound of the organ, and the villagers walk about in ill-fitting garments of respectability: a simple God-fearing community, knowing no world but their own, and finding their joy of life in mere existence.

It was gathering dusk, one summer evening in the year 1914, when the figure of a young officer wended its way towards "Les Voyageurs."

He had crossed from Haileybury on the afternoon boat, causing not a little comment by the uniform he wore. All in the mining country knew him as "Dug" Campbell, manager of the Curran Like Mine—they were hardly prepared for the



sudden transition from his usual costume of riding-breeches, brown shirt, and lumberman's boots, to the trappings of a British officer. He was a young man of big stature, with broad, restless shoulders that seemed to chafe under the bondage of a tunic, and he had a long, loose-limbed stride oddly at variance with the usual conception of military bearing. His eyes were light blue, his hair an unruly brown that flirted with red—and his name was Campbell. Such men do not wait for the second call when there is war.

Wherever civilization is forcing her right of way, wherever she is fighting for her existence, the descendants of Scotland will be found. When a new railroad struggles over unnamed rivers and through untrodden forests, somewhere ahead there is always a son or a grandson of old Scotia, whose eyes are a humorous blue and whose hair has more than a tinge of red. There is no part of the world to which the Scot is a stranger, but he rises to his best in a new country where waterfalls must be harnessed to give power; where great rocks must be blasted from age-old foundations; where rebellious nature in

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

her primeval state must be taught that the world was made for man.

On that August evening in that most fateful of years, the figure of Captain Douglas Campbell, tall and somewhat rugged, like one of the northern trees, might have served as a sculptor's model for the spirit of Scotland confirming and strengthening the purpose of young Canada.

Rich in tradition as she is, what glory of her past can Scotland have that is greater than this—that, strong in the manhood which seems to spring from the soil of her country, she sent her sons to every corner of the world; and when the shadow of war fell upon her—they came back! Sons, grandsons, those to whom their Scottish blood was little more than a family legend, *they came back*.

Scotland needs no other monument than those three words.

## II

Nearing "Les Voyageurs" the young officer paused at a sudden burst of sound that came from the inn. In place of the usual chorus, one voice, a slovenly but powerful one, was bellow-

## PETITE SIMUNDE

ing forth a ribald song, remarkable only for its noisy coarseness. Reaching the hostelry, Campbell hammered at the door, which was opened by mine host himself.

“Ah!” he gesticulated eloquently, “Monsieur Cam-pell?” (Pierre Generaud, like all French-Canadians, invariably reversed his accents on English words.) “For why you come, eh?”

“My dear Generaud, must I give reason for visiting the famous ‘Les Voyageurs’?”

“Ah! By gosh, no!” He beamed welcome in every pore—then struck an attitude of despair. “You come, is it not, as an officier, perhaps no—yes?”

“Correct. I want to speak just for a minute to the men inside.”

“Oh, *mais non!*” The good host’s gesture was a masterpiece, even among a race of gesticulators. “Not to-night, monsieur.”

“And why not?”

“By Gar! Who you theenk is inside now? Listen—she sing!”

Campbell was too well acquainted with the universal French-Canadian use of the feminine pronoun to express any surprise when “she”



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

proved to be the possessor of the aforesaid raucous, bass voice, which had broken into some song anent the passion of a sailor for a Portuguese young lady of great charm but doubtful modesty.

“Who is our friend?” asked the officer.

“What—you know not? She is the terrible Des Rosiers!”

“Well, I don’t like Mr. Des Rosiers’s voice.”

“You nevair hear her name, monsieur? Sometime she is called ‘Jacque Noir.’ *Mon Dieu!*—she sleep with *le diable*.”

The landlord’s eyes grew wide with horror; his shoulders contracted until they touched his ears.

“Look here, my friend,” said Campbell, with a tinge of impatience, “Jacque Noir or Jacque Rouge or Jacque Blanc is not going to keep me out here.”

“But, monsieur, once she *keel* a man.”

“My dear fellow——”

“One winter, a man has insult Des Rosiers, and—*voilà!* Jacque Noir *burn* her house—*keel* her family—*murdair* her”——

With a laugh, the newly created officer thrust the little man aside and entered the sacred pre-

## PETITE SIMUNDE

cincts of "Les Voyageurs." A big, dirty, bearded fellow of about thirty years of age was leaning against the counter, waving a mug and bellowing a song. He looked formidable enough, but hardly justified the diabolical qualities attributed to him by Pierre Generaud. In spite of his unshaven face with its bloodshot, inebriated eyes, there was something not unpleasing about the fellow, and when his lips parted they disclosed teeth that were gleaming white.

A group of villagers sat in open-mouthed admiration beneath the singer, for Des Rosiers's reputation had gathered velocity like a snowball rolling down the side of a hill, gaining in size every time it came into contact with the drifts of rumor, until it had become almost a legend of wickedness. His audience felt a timid pride in the event. It was as if his Satanic Majesty himself had condescended to appear from below and sing comic songs for their benefit.

On the entrance of the officer, the song ceased, and all eyes were turned to the new-comer.

"*Holà*," said Des Rosiers, with extraordinary resonance. "You drink by me, *eh bien*?"

"No, thanks. I must only stay a minute."

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"You no drink?" roared the lumber-jack, whose hospitality was not unlike the forcefulness of the muscular Christian in "Androcles and the Lion."

"You drink, or, by Gar, I brak your neck."

A hum of admiration rose from the villagers. They bore no possible malice towards the officer, but it was gratifying to find Jacque Noir living up to his reputation.

"*Messieurs*," said Campbell, ignoring the gentleman in question, "there is a war. *La belle France* fights for her life, and Canada must help. She needs you—and you—and you."

With their meager knowledge of English, he was forced to a simplicity of language that depended almost entirely on the personal appeal for effect. "Come with me to the war. We pay you one dollar ten a day, and your wife and *garçons* get money too."

Mr. Des Rosiers laughed, scornfully and sonorously. "I laugh," he said. "You theenk we go to war, and you English, by Gar, no leave Canada, but steal all we leave behind. The French-Canadian—he go; the English-Canadian, *non*." He roared a vile oath, and laid his hand on Camp-



bell's shoulder. "I brak your neck," he said comfortingly.

In a moment Campbell's tunic was off and he was facing Jacque Noir. "You are a liar, Des Rosiers," he said. "You are the greatest liar and the worst singer in the province of Quebec."

The Frenchman tore the red kerchief from his neck and hurled the mug to the floor, where it broke into a hundred pieces. "By gosh, me!" he bellowed in a voice that would have terrified a bull. "I *keel* you!"

He advanced in windmill fashion, but his opponent, who had been one of the best boxers of his year at Toronto 'Varsity, stopped him with a blow known technically as a "straight left to the jaw." Des Rosiers paused to collect his thoughts. He was wondering whether to kick with one foot or with both, when something happened, and oblivion settled over him like the curtain on the last act of a melodrama. Campbell had stepped forward, and, putting his shoulder behind it, had delivered a blow on the lower part of the jaw with force enough to fell an ox. For Des Rosiers the rest was silence.

Concluding his recruiting speech to the dazed

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

villagers, Campbell put on his tunic and strode down the street. . . . But the fall of Mr. Pecksniff in the eyes of Tom Pinch was not more complete than the collapse of their idol, Jacque Noir, in the eyes of the inhabitants of Ville Marie.

### III

A sky that was hung with stars looked down upon the shimmering roof-tops of Haileybury. The streets were deserted except in the main thoroughfare, where a group of men were seated in an irregular line, their pipes glowing in the darkness. They had been there since dusk.

Midnight passed, and the shadowy line was longer as each hour struck. Men with heavy packs; men with the mud of the northern wilderness still on their boots; men who had walked for sixty miles; men whose beardless chins bespoke the schoolboys of a year before; men whose faces would have looked coarse and cruel in any light but that of the stars; one by one or in pairs they came. For each there was a yell of welcome, a ribald jest or two—then silence once more, and the glowing pipes. The first glimmering streaks of dawn showed the queue in all its picturesque

## PETITE SIMUNDE

grotesqueness. The man in front was leaning against a frame store that bore the placard "Recruiting Office."

Some three thousand miles away, a Hohenzollern Emperor had said that the British Empire would crumble into disintegration at the first sound of war. And through the forests of the north and over weary trails men were staggering on, mile after mile, fearful of one thing only—that they might be too late to answer the call which had come from across the Atlantic, speeding over forests, cities, prairies, lakes, and mountains until echo answered from the shores of the Pacific Coast.

The early boat from Ville Marie discharged its half-dozen passengers. A powerfully built French-Canadian strode up the hill and stopped at the crowd of men. With a worried contraction of his heavy eyebrows he surveyed the formidable length of the line.

"Godam!" said he.

Heedless of the jests and the comments of the mob, he went slowly down the line, carefully scrutinizing each man, until he stopped at a half-breed Indian. For a moment only they argued



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

in French, then he produced a roll of dollar notes in one hand, and brandished the other hand threateningly in the half-breed's face. The combined arguments proved too much; when the enrollment of recruits took place, number eighteen was Jacque Des Rosiers, sworn to serve His Majesty the King for the duration of the war and six months afterwards—in witness whereof he had drawn an inky cross after his name.

It would be difficult to give the exact motive for his action. He probably had never heard of Belgium, but—well, take horns and tail from the devil, and what is left?

Three weeks later the company of amateur soldiers were warned to proceed to the concentration camp. Willing, but puzzled by the infliction of army discipline, they had struggled past the first pitfalls of recruitship. For the sake of Captain Douglas Campbell, their “boss,” they had suppressed their grumbling and submitted to the rites and ceremonies of military routine, arguing that, inexplicable as it was, it had some connection, however remote, with the ultimate goal of warfare. The afternoon before their departure Campbell spoke to them for exactly five

minutes. His hair looked redder and his eyes seemed bluer than before. His powerfully built shoulders and the rhythm of his muscles lent a grace to his entire body, despite its ruggedness.

“Look here, you fellows,” he said, “you signed up to fight—so did I. We will fight, too, but Kitchener can’t use us until we’re ready. You wonder what all this drill is about. Well, here’s my idea about it. There isn’t a coward in this crowd; there isn’t a man who wouldn’t go down a shaft after a pal, even if the chances were a hundred to one against his coming back. But you’re not ready for the front. You’ve got the heart, but your bodies must have training and discipline. Watch me with this cigarette. In flicking the ash I burn my finger; the next time I want to touch the ash, my finger avoids it by a quarter of an inch. I laugh and try again. You all know what I mean. I am not afraid of the cigarette, but my finger is. If you’ve ever been kicked in the leg by a horse, the next time that horse kicks, which of your legs is drawn back first? In some strange way your body has instincts of its own, and though you might have a heart like a bull, your muscles and nerves—your body

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

—might fail you when you needed them most. As I understand the army system, it is to train you to obey, not only mentally but physically. Eight months from now we may be lying half-dead with the enemy's guns playing hell all around us. We may want to quit, we may be 'all in,' but, if the order comes to advance, we'll go forward, because our bodies will be disciplined to obey.

"Be patient then, men, and just grin when things go wrong. I would gladly have gone with you in the ranks, and there are lots of you chaps better able to lead than I, but a commission was given to me, and I'm out to do my best with the finest company of men in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. I'm learning all the time—as you are. You will have bad times, and so shall I; but let's help each other to laugh and make the best of it, for, after all, we're just great big children playing a mighty big game. . . . And when we reach France we'll show them all that the old Cobalt gang is afraid of nothing in this world or the next."

They cheered—and the man who shouted loudest was Jacque Des Rosiers. . . . And some-



## PETITE SIMUNDE

where in the speech *esprit de corps* had been born.

### IV

Four winters passed by.

France lay in the warmth of a late spring evening, like a stricken deer that has thrown off its pursuers momentarily, but is bleeding from a hundred wounds. Month after month she had endured the invader, and the cycle of years, instead of freeing her had only deepened her agony. What had she left? The next attack would see Arras and her remaining coalfields gone, the Channel ports captured, and then . . . Paris? . . . Paris?

Unperturbed, however, by any such thoughts, Petite Simunde—no one thought of her by any other name—was driving four cows home from pasture. The setting sun shed a kindly hue on her gingham garment that was neither a frock nor an apron, yet served as both. Nor was the mellowing sunlight unkind to her face, for the racial sallowness of her cheeks, accentuated by too constant exposure to the elements, was soft-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

ened and shaded into a gentle brown. Her shoes, which were far too large, were in the final stages of disrepair. About the brow her hair was braided with a simplicity that was by no means devoid of charm. Her eyes—but there she was really French. Simunde had never been farther from the village of Le Curois than the neighboring town of Avesnes Le Comte (unless one counts the momentous occasion, a year after her birth, when she was taken to Arras for exhibition before an esteemed and wealthy relative, who was so little impressed that he bequeathed his entire estate, consisting of eight thousand francs, to a manufacturer of tombstones); but a French woman does not acquire coquetry—she is born with it. Even in church Simunde would cast such languishing yet mischievous eyes upon the curé himself, that the poor little man, who had never liked Latin at any time, used to stammer and mumble his orisons like an over-conscientious penitent at confessional.

When her two brothers went to war Simunde, who was then sixteen, assumed their tasks in addition to her own, in all of which she had the able direction of “madame” her mother. Between

## PETITE SIMUNDE

them they performed a day's work that would have exhausted two husky laborers. As is the custom in most of northern France, their home was not on the farm, but in the village, for one of the first essentials of existence to a Frenchman is companionship. On the outskirts of Le Curois, just on the hill, there was a great château, beautifully, gloomily aloof; but in the one street of the village itself, pigs, cows, hens and their offspring wallowed in mud and accumulated filth.

It is difficult to know which is the more striking: the French peasant's stoicism in the presence of war, or his indifference to dirt.

On this particular evening in May of 1918 Simunde was frankly regretting the absence of men. Not that she had ever been in love or known the rapture of wandering in the moonlight with a man (France is almost the only civilized country remaining that has not relegated chaperons to the realm of fiction); but she wanted to use her eyes on something more susceptible than a cow or a curé. It was spring, and she felt pretty, and when a woman is conscious of her own charm she seldom wishes to prove miserly with it.

She had just run across the road to convince a



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

cow of its loss of the sense of direction when she heard the neighing of a horse. Glancing behind her, she looked directly into the eyes of a mounted British officer, whereupon that gentleman brought his steed to a standstill.

*"Bon soir, mademoiselle,"* he said.

*"Bon soir, monsieur,"* she answered demurely. Her eyes were lowered shyly, and her fingers played over the stick she was carrying, like a flute-player caressing his instrument. The officer bowed slightly and tried to recall his French vocabulary, though it must be admitted he was never loquacious in any tongue when conversing with a daughter of Eve. As for her, since it is a woman's *rôle*, she waited. Would he speak again or would he pass on, leaving the memory of yet one more meeting with a gentleman of adventure—one more roadside drama in which the dialogue consisted only of an exchange of salutations. Most men who have returned from France will recall for years to come how, a few kilometres back from Hell, they often caught a glimpse of two dark eyes and a tender smile. Just that and—

*"Bon soir, mademoiselle."*

## PETITE SIMUNDE

*"Bon soir, monsieur."*

Commonplace, perhaps, in the telling, but in France it was the commonplace that became romance.

A smile crept into the officer's eyes, which were blue and kindly, though they had a glint in them—something like metal—a look that a mother always noticed first when her son returned from the line.

*"Où est le village?"* he ventured.

*"Le Curois?"*

*"Oui! Le Curois."*

*"Mais, monsieur"*—her eyes widened and her hands indicated the village dwellings—*"c'est ici Le Curois!"*

He breathed deeply and ventured again.

*"Connaissez-vous un billet pour dix officiers?"*

He felt rather pleased with the sentence; it was true he had intended to get accommodation for eleven officers, but it was moderately accurate for a foreign tongue.

For answer Simunde led him, preceded by the four cows, to her domicile as "Madame," like all French housewives had received billeting instructions in the first year of the war. In conjunction

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

with her neighbors on either side, she speedily arranged accommodation for eleven officers in their cottages, and for the officers' *domestiques* in the barns.

One hour later the guests of war, their battalion having come out for a rest, were dining comfortably in the home of Petite Simunde, while a sow, attended by ten small pigs, snorted approvingly outside the door.

Less than an hour afterwards Private Des Rosiers, acting as temporary batman to Major Douglas Campbell, was sitting on a chair in the farm-yard, in the glittering moonlight, regaling Simunde and her mother with grossly exaggerated stories of the mining country of Cobalt. He told them of his misdeeds, not in humility, but with much *braggadocio*, and his auditors listened, lost in gesticulatory admiration. Simunde was thrilled from her ill-shod feet to her braided brow. Jacque Des Rosiers was the first really wicked man she had met, and, woman-like, she was fascinated; also he had nice teeth and flashing eyes.

The picture of a young officer on horseback whose brown hair was almost red and whose



## PETITE SIMUNDE

humorous blue eyes had a glint in them like metal, faded as completely from her mind as the memory of the sunset that had thrown its spell upon them.

Unromantic? . . . *Que voulez-vous? C'est la guerre!*

### V.

Two weeks passed, during which period the placid fields about Le Curois resounded to the shouts of Canadian troops rehearsing open warfare (for rumor had it that the hour was almost at hand when Foch was to release the forces of retribution). For pastime, the troops played baseball and held field-days of many and varied sports. Whatever they did, they shouted lustily and continuously while doing it, for they had mastered one elemental truth—that nothing can be accomplished without intensity.

Des Rosiers explained baseball to Simunde, who enjoyed the description without allowing it to interfere with her innumerable domestic and agricultural duties. It was quite true that Jacque Noir had never played the game or even mastered

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

its rudiments, but he had the narrator's instinct that rises above mere accuracy of detail.

Every evening he accompanied Simunde to the pasture-land, and together they guided the patient cows homeward. When darkness set in and Simunde's tasks were finished for the day, he sat with her in the farm-yard and told lurid tales of northern Canada—to all of which “madame,” whose tasks were never finished, lent a delighted and adjoining ear.

He pictured to Simunde the snow—how it filled the rivers till they ran no more; how it covered the great pine-trees until, as far as eye could see, there was nothing but white; and he told of the wind that was never still. And she listened, as only a Frenchwoman can listen, with every emotion he called forth registering in her face, as clouds racing across the sun will throw their shadows on the ground.

Just before the battalion was to return to the line, the second in command, Major Douglas Campbell, was called to Divisional Headquarters for a prolonged conference. As a result Des Rosiers was returned to his company for duty, though he contrived to spend every free hour

## PETITE SIMUNDE

with the little belle of Le Curois. As the time for parting approached with cruel celerity, he talked less and took to long spells of moody silence. His heart had been melted as completely as the snow in his Northland is thawed by the sun in spring. As for her, the little artifices of gesture and the ceaseless coquetry of the eyes became less noticeable. For the first time in her life she felt the anguish of a woman's tears; Petite Simunde's guileless and innocent heart had been won by Jacque Des Rosiers, the bad man of Northern Quebec.

In a tempest of passionate ardor, but with becoming deference, he addressed his suit to the mother, who promised consideration that night and her answer on the morrow.

It was hardly twilight when he wandered back along the main road towards the fields where his battalion was bivouacked. Full of the picture of the little woman who had bewitched him, he failed to notice the approach of an exceedingly smart young staff-officer, ablaze in a glory of red and brass. With unseeing eyes, Des Rosiers looked directly at the young gentleman, but failed to make any sign. The officer, fresh from



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

a staff course in England, stopped him with a sharp command.

"Just a moment, my man. Don't you know enough to salute?"

Des Rosiers awoke from his dream, came to attention, and saluted very badly.

"I no see you, sair," he said.

"Don't lie to me," snapped Brass Hat (who wasn't a bad chap on the whole); "of course you saw me. Damn it, you looked right at me. It's fellows like you who give the corps a bad name."

He was wrong there. It was the presence of several thousand men like Des Rosiers that had given the Canadian Corps a wonderful name—but let that pass, as Jack Point would have said.

The element of tragedy seldom enters the lists of life with a fanfare of trumpets. It steals in unobtrusively, like a poor relation. It comes in the garb of the commonplace, or masked in triviality or gaiety. One is unaware of its presence until it throws off concealment and points its yellow fingers at the throat of its victims. What dramatist would have read tragedy into the absurd tableau presented by a slouchy French-Canadian soldier and a youthful staff-officer?

## PETITE SIMUNDE

Yet, as inexorable as Fate, it was approaching Jacque Des Rosiers, and only a few yards away, hiding its skeleton's grin behind the mundane countenance of Sergeant Smith, returning to the battalion after a day's work in the orderly room.

The officer, who had just made a move to resume his walk, noticed the sergeant, and called him over.

"You are from the same battalion as this chap?"

"Yes, sir."

"Report him to his company commander for failing to salute an officer. Impress upon him that I would not have made this complaint, but your man looked directly at me, and—well, discipline must be maintained, especially out here."

Whereupon, feeling that he had rendered unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, the youthful captain sauntered on to the château, occupied by Divisional Headquarters, and dined with extra zest. And if it be thought that this narrative treats him unkindly, let it be written that, three months later, he was badly wounded while performing a very gallant action. He was a profes-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

sional soldier, somewhat lacking in psychology; that was all.

A little later Private Des Rosiers was arraigned before his company commander, a gentleman who was neither a soldier nor a psychologist. The heinous crime of passing an officer without acknowledgment was laid to the charge of the battle-worn and love-lorn villain from Quebec.

"What have you got to say for yourself?"

Des Rosiers said it. The officer shook his head.

"It's not good enough," he said. "You French-Canadians seem to think there's one law for yourselves and another for everybody else. You throw all your comrades down by deliberately insulting an officer—a staff-officer, who reports it to the G.O.C., and there you are. We're known as a bad battalion just because of a few slackers like you. Put him on the horse line picket for two nights, and confine him to camp during the day."

The prisoner started. "Sair," he said, "I can no be here to-morrow night. *C'est impossible.*"

"Oh, is it emposeeble?" answered the officer, who prided himself on a gift of neat retort. Des Rosiers's eyes protruded to their utmost.



## PETITE SIMUNDE

“By Gar!” he cried, “and nex’ morning we go back to the line *encore*, yes?”

“Well? Have you any objections? If so, I am sure the divisional commander would appreciate hearing them.”

“Ah, but *monsieur l’officier*”—his hands were stretched forth in an agony of appeal—“Petite Simunde, she wait for me. I promise to come—I no come—it is terrible!”

The judge in khaki laughed.

“I am fed up with the stories of you French-Canadians and your village sweethearts—and, confound it, stop waving your hands about!”

“Standt’attenshun!” bellowed the sergeant-major.

“Consider yourself lucky to get off so lightly, my man.—That will do, sergeant-major.”

“Escor’ a’prisoner—ri tuh—qui’ mawch.—Lef’ ri’, lef’ ri’, lef’ ri—Pawty, ha’t.—Report to horse line N.C.O. right away.—Escor’, dees-mi!”

Rather late for mess, by reason of holding orderly room at an unusual hour, the company commander sat down to dinner with a glow of virtue in his bosom. He had been a lawyer-politician in a small Ontario town, and it pleased

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

him to find that he had not lost the art of Buzfuzian browbeating.

And through it all the Fates had woven a thread of tragedy about the life of Jacque Noir, using in their scheme of things a non-psychological staff-officer, a non-military and non-psychological company commander, and a sergeant whose name was Smith.

"There is humor in all things," said Jack Point. Gilbert would have been equally correct if he had substituted the word "tragedy."

Before sundown of the next day the prisoner was reported absent, and when the battalion marched away for the line Jacque Des Rosiers was not with it.

## VI

Four days had passed before the second-in-command rejoined his unit in the trenches. Campbell had been held at Divisional Headquarters, and now for the first time learned of Des Rosiers's desertion. With a stiffening of the jaw and an ugly contraction of his shoulders, he quickly interrogated tragedy's mummers—a sergeant named Smith and a politician-lawyer

## PETITE SIMUNDE

company commander. To the former he said nothing; the man had done his obvious duty. To the company commander he gave a careful hearing; then, in short staccato sentences that had an odd resemblance to a machine-gun in action, subjected him to brief questioning.

"What is Des Rosiers's conduct-sheet like?"

"Pretty bad, sir."

"What were his crimes?"

"Oh, the usual things—dirty on C.O.'s inspection, equipment missing, late for parades, and generally slovenly. If he hadn't had such a poor sheet, he would have been decorated."

"In other words, his crimes are rest-billet ones. Is that correct?"

"Well—yes, sir."

"But in the line he earned a decoration?"

"Yes—at Vimy, he——"

"Have you known him to lie?"

"Well, you know what these French-Canadians are like."

"You understand what I mean. Have you ever known him to lie when put on his honor?"

"Er—no."

"When he told you that he had to see this girl,



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

did you find out if he was speaking the truth?"

"No, sir, I——"

"Did you look for him at this girl's place when you were coming away?"

"I sent a picket through the village."

The blue in Campbell's eyes became unpleasantly light. "I had Des Rosiers in my company at Ypres when the Hun sent over his first gas—you were addressing meetings in Canada at the time—and I know him for a brave chap, as faithful as a dog. It's men like you with a sense of vision no better than a mud-puddle that are making the French-Canadian question another Irish one. They are like children, easily swayed and true as steel to those they trust; but as long as you and your kind make a political cat's-paw out of them, alternately yelling 'Kamerad' and 'Traitor,' according to the political exigencies of the moment, so long will Canada be without the sympathy and the enriching of a wonderfully virile race."

The junior officer's face flushed. "I acted according to the evidence," he persisted hotly.

"Damn the evidence!" said Campbell furiously. "Play the man, not the charge-sheet. Does Des

## PETITE SIMUNDE

Rosiers strike you as a chap who would deliberately insult a staff-officer? When he is caught he will be shot. It can't be helped—discipline must be maintained; but I tell you, when, every few days I read in the adjutant-general's orders that Private So-and-So, charged with desertion in the presence of the enemy, was apprehended in a certain village, tried by court-martial, and sentenced to be shot, sentence duly carried out at 4:15 A. M. on such and such a date—you know the ghastly rhythm of the thing as well as I do—I never read one of these announcements without having a bad ten minutes afterwards. I don't question the decision of the court—a deserter must pay the penalty—but, mark my words, behind every one of these offences there is the unseen part played by some officer or N.C.O. who punished at the wrong time or failed to punish at the right. There are far too many machine-made routine-fed chaps in the army, with stars on their cuffs, who don't know that there are times when the grip of a hand on a Tommy's shoulder, and a few words as man to man, free of any cursed condescension, are worth all the conduct-sheets in existence."

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"You are making a mountain out of a molehill, sir. I consider you are very unfair to me."

"You do, eh? . . . What about your unfairness to Des Rosiers and his little French girl, when he faces a firing-squad in the early morning?"

With an angry gesture, Campbell left the dug-out and hurried to Battalion Headquarters. For twenty minutes he and the colonel, a gentleman and a soldier, quietly but firmly discussed the case of desertion.

"I agree with everything you say, Campbell," said the older man, "and I will strongly recommend mercy to the court; but I am commanding a unit made up of many personalities, and must think of the example to all."

"Very good, sir. By the way, colonel, I know where Des Rosiers is."

"You do? Then send word to the A.P.M."

"Excuse me, sir; may I go and bring him myself? I ask this as a very great favor."

The colonel pondered for a moment. "When will you be back?" he said.

"Before 'Stand to' in the morning."

"Right—but, Campbell, my boy."



## PETITE SIMUNDE

"Sir."

"Whatever you have in mind, remember that your duty and mine is to think of the example to the battalion."

The blue in Campbell's eyes deepened; then, with an imperious gesture of the head, like that of a horse that hears the sound of galloping hoofs a mile away, he saluted.

"I shall not forget what you say, sir."

"Thank you, Douglas."

With a restless impatience for delay, Campbell left the dug-out and climbed from the trench to open land. Heedless of a machine-gun that spat at him from the enemy lines, he hurried on until he reached the brigade transport lines, where he secured a motor-car.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

"Le Curois," said the major; "and drop me just before you come to the village."

## VII

In the scorching heat of a summer afternoon, Petite Simunde was washing some linen outside

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

her cottage home. The silence, like the heat, was oppressive, and seemed more so by contrast with the noise of the troops who had been there a week before. An apple falling from a tree to the ground; the restless pounding of a horse's hoof in its stall; the distant hum of an aeroplane; the rumble of guns, faint but ominous—these and the sighs of the little woman at her task, were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the air.

She heard footsteps, and her heart, more than her eyes, told her that the man she dreaded had come. Her face blanched, and she caught her breath with a spasm of pain.

“Simunde”—Campbell's voice was gentle but firm—“where is Jacque?”

She continued her work without looking up.

“Simunde”—again the quiet monotone — “where is Jacque?”

She shook her head. “No compree” she faltered, falling into the jargon of war.

“Simunde!” There was an inflection in his voice, an almost imperceptible note of severity, that set her heart throbbing with fear. This was a new person to her, this calm, stern, blue-eyed man who showed no excitement, no anger, only a

## PETITE SIMUNDE

quiet, kindly severity that gave her no chance for subterfuge. She hated him for his calmness—because he was English—because he was unfair. If he had only shouted or gesticulated—but this brown-haired giant! To oppose him was like trying to stem the incoming tide.

She looked up suddenly, and her dripping hands were clenched in a fever of supplication. Madly she pleaded for her lover, as a woman will plead only for the man she loves or for her child. Tears ran down her cheeks, and her voice was choked with sobs.

Patiently he listened, gathering from the anguish more than from her words the story he had already guessed. In a climax of grief, she groped for him with her hands and would have cried on his breast. But he made no move; only his eyes were very grave and tender.

“Simunde,” he reiterated in English, “where is Jacque?”

With a shrill cry of rage, she stamped her foot on the ground. This great iceberg of a man was a devil! He had come for her lover. He would take Jacque away to be shot. With an involuntary instinct of dismay, she glanced at the barn



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

some little distance away; then, fearful that he had read her meaning, she forced a smile with her lips.

Without a word, he put her gently aside and started for the barn. He had gone ten steps before she moved, when he heard her hurried breathing and her hands were on his arm.

"*Monsieur*," she cried—"monsieur le major—Jacque—Jacque *keel* you!" She spoke in broken English, remembering one of Des Rosiers's stories of his misdeeds. Releasing her fingers, he reached the barn in a few short paces. Opening the door, he cautiously entered and tried to accustom himself to the semi-darkness—and saw the barrel of a rifle in the loft slowly aligning itself in his direction.

"Des Rosiers!" His voice rang out like a pistol-shot. "It is I—your officer!"

There was no sound for almost a full minute, then the rifle was withdrawn, and the unshaved, disheveled French-Canadian stood before him.

"Why you come?" he said brokenly. "I can no shoot my officier. Why you come, eh?"

"Because you will go back with me, Des Rosiers."

## PETITE SIMUNDE

The deserter's eyes filled with tears. "By Gar!" he said, "it is not, what you say, play fair. I say I shoot who come, and Jacque Des Rosiers, he is no afraid. But you—my boss—*mais non!* Maybe I go back with you and maybe they shoot me, yes?"

"You have deserted, and the punishment is—well, you know as well as I. If you come with me now there is a small chance of mercy."

The man's eyes flashed. "I no ask for mercy," he cried. "I, Jacque Des Rosiers want mercy? Pouf! I laugh. They tell me I no see Simunde again, when I do nottings wrong. *Très bien*—I say sometings about it too. I go, I stay—*mêm' chose*; I am shot. Good! I stay with Simunde."

Campbell took a step forward, and there was metal in his voice as well as in his eyes. His hand fell on the other's shoulder and gripped it like a vice. "You will come back with me," he said, and again there was a strange similarity to a machine-gun; "not that you may receive mercy, but because you are a coward, and must face your punishment for desertion in the presence of the enemy."

Des Rosiers's face darkened.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Now, at this minute,” went on Campbell, “the battalion, your battalion and mine, is in the line. Because you were not there, another man is in your place, perhaps at sentry duty. He may be dead by now—and why? Because he did his duty, and took the place of a man who was afraid.”

The French-Canadian’s breath was hot with fury. He clenched his fists, and great veins stood out on his forehead. “By gosh, me!” he yelled; “who say Jacque Noir, she is afraid?”

With apparent calm, but his muscles poised for action, the officer looked squarely at him. “I say you are a coward,” he answered. “You were afraid to go to the line with your comrades. You are afraid now to face your punishment.”

He noticed that Jacque was crouching for a spring. With a shrug of his shoulders, he produced a cigarette-case and put a cigarette into his mouth.

“Well?” he said.

It was the second time he had beaten Des Rosiers. The poor fellow paused, then fell at his feet and exhausted his passion in a sobbing



## PETITE SIMUNDE

explanation that would have been ludicrous but for the sincerity of anguish behind it.

A few minutes later they went together from the barn. Simunde was standing by her door. From the interior of the house the lamentations of "madame" could be heard. With a simplicity that strangely ennobled the rough fellow, Des Rosiers stopped and spoke to Simunde in French, then kissed her on the lips with a reverence that was more moving than the deepest passion. Without a word, he entered the motor-car and stared fixedly ahead at the road which climbed by the château. With a half-sob, Simunde turned to the officer. She said nothing, but her tears spoke a language that needed no words. The metal in his eyes melted into a deep compassionate blue; and Petite Simunde's troubled little heart thanked God for the great, broad-shouldered man with the hair that was almost red.

## VIII

The two men slept in a deserted hut that night, but an hour before daybreak they were wending

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

their way through the communication-trenches to the front line. It was half-an-hour before "Stand to" when the major and his unkempt companion reached the last dark trench where sentries were straining their eyes at the blackness of No Man's Land. A junior officer stepped up to the major and reported, quietly, the situation during the night.

"They've got a machine-gun post," he said at the end, "somewhere over by those three trees. Can you see them, sir? They got five of our chaps last night and two the night before."

"Humph! They tried for me too, yesterday afternoon. Can't the guns do anything?"

"They've tried, sir, but the rise in the ground seems to protect them from anything except a direct hit."

Even in the darkness the young lieutenant could notice the sudden look of decision which flashed into Campbell's eyes.

"Give me an A form," he said tersely.

The lieutenant handed him a message-pad on which he wrote a few words.

"See that the colonel gets this," he said, "and pass word along to the other companies that Pri-

## PETITE SIMUNDE

vate Des Rosiers and I are going to get that machine-gun post; so if we come back don't give us too hot a reception from your sentries.—Sergeant, some bombs.—And let Des Rosiers have that revolver, old chap. My batman will give you one of mine. Right—thanks.”

“But, sir”—the young officer was vastly troubled—“it's not up to you. I'll go, major. Honestly, I want to——”

“Thanks, old man; but this is a bigger job than it looks. Not that you couldn't do it as well or better, but—well, I've set my heart on going, that's all.”

He glanced at Des Rosiers, and noticed that his face was grim and set.

“But, my officier, it is not fair,” began the French-Canadian; “it——”

“Not fair?” There was a rasping sound in the major's voice.

“For me, *mais oui*, but for you, *non*. Please—I do my bes'—I go alone.”

Without a word, the second-in-command put out his hand and grasped that of the deserter; and Des Rosiers felt that death for the other would be easy. Truly, as Campbell had said,



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

war is a great big game, and men are like children.

Three minutes later two figures were crawling like panthers towards the German lines.

### IX

The colonel of the battalion took the message from the runner's hand. It contained seven words:

*"As an example to the battalion.*

CAMPBELL."

"What's that noise?"

"Sounds like Mills bombs," said the adjutant.

"And revolvers," muttered the colonel, and swore softly to himself with a lip that quivered strangely.

### X

If ever you go to the Cobalt country, do not fail to take the boat to Ville Marie, on the blue shores of Pontiac.

There is an excellent hostelry at Ville Marie called "Les Voyageurs," where a little lady,

## PETITE SIMUNDE

known as Petite Simunde, has worked wonders in making it the cosiest, snuggest, neatest little place that ever warmed the heart of a lumber-jack or a mining-pro prospector. At night her husband leads the singing with a mighty voice that shakes the rafters; for did not the former proprietor, Pierre Generaud, say that singing encouraged thirst?

At times, when Madame Des Rosiers is away for a day, Jacque Noir will regale his old friends with tales of his past life, stories that differ with every telling, and seem to indicate that the narrator himself is beginning to doubt their accuracy. At these times, too, he has been known to sing of a sailor who loved a Portuguese maid; but at the first sound of his wife's footsteps outside Monsieur Des Rosiers is the model husband, a *rôle*, to be frank, which suits him quite well.

When the snow is very thick on the ground, and the wind howls mournfully over the lake, Jacque Noir talks of France and the weary years of war. He will point with pride to his artificial foot, and then to his decoration, and slowly tell how two men went out into the dark after a machine-gun post.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

And when the guests are gone and the fire is low, when the wind is moaning quietly, while the snow falls thick—thick—thick—they speak to each other of the officer who will never come back; of the one whose hair was brown, almost like red; whose blue eyes were stern, and yet so kind.

Hand-in-hand they sit close together, and the only sounds are those of the crackling logs and the wind that is never still.



# THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

## I

**D**ENNIS MONTAGUE of Toronto emerged from his bath, glowing and talkative. A luxurious deep-blue dressing-gown was wrapped about his form, its color accentuating the gray-blue of his eyes. His valet stood beside his bed, on which there reposed a set of garments suitable for a gentleman bent on spending an evening out.

“Ah, Sylvester! That’s right. We poor devils must look as well as the abominable fashions will permit. Did you ever wonder why the men of to-day are so commonplace? It is the clothes they wear.”

Mr. Sylvester took the dressing-gown and hung it in the closet.

“For instance, my dear fellow, to-night I am in a devilishly brilliant mood; almost any moment

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

now I might say something clever. If I had my way, I should dress in scarlet, like a toreador, and when I spoke, my sentences would have something of the dart about them. . . . Such would be the fusion of temperament and costume. Instead of which—by the way, mix me a cocktail—I am forced to put on this hideous shirt and a swallow-tailed monstrosity that gives one the appearance of a reformed chimney-sweep. A greater man than either of us, Sylvester, said that the world was all a stage. Then why the deuce don't we dress for our parts?"

"'Ere's your cocktail, sir."

"Good—excellent. What's the time?"

"Gone past seven-thirty, sir."

"By Jove! I shall be late. I am always late, my dear chap; it partly accounts for my extraordinary popularity. A hostess is so relieved to see me by the time I turn up that for years afterwards she associates my face with pleasant sensations. Any mail, Sylvester?"

His servant crossed to the table, on which there reposed four letters. "These came in this afternoon, sir."

"Read them to me while I dress."

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

“Read them, Mr. Montague?” The valet’s face was a study of respectful expostulation.

“Is the idea so preposterous, my dear fellow? I believe most people write letters with the idea of having them read.”

The decorous Sylvester sighed, and broke the seal of the first letter. “I would beg to remind you,” he read, “that your account——”

Montague made a deprecatory gesture. “How polite these trades-people are!” he said. “I shall expect one some day to enclose forget-me-nots. The next letter?”

Sylvester solemnly opened a diminutive envelope. “Mrs. W. De-Ponsy Harris requests the pleasure——”

“Another request! What is it—a tea or a dance?”

“A dinner, sir.”

“Good! I shall go. Mrs. Harris is the worst hostess in the city, but she keeps the best cook. Proceed.”

The worthy Sylvester took from the table a delicately scented letter that breathed its delightful suggestion of romance to his grateful nostrils, whereupon he promptly blushed a deep, unlovely,



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

tomato-like red. "It starts," said he, "'My Dearest Love——'"

His master glanced at him. "Don't blush," he said. "The *grande passion* is nothing to be ashamed of." He carefully adjusted his tie. "What is the young lady's name?"

"Myrtle, sir."

"Ah, yes; poor little Myrtle! What a pity a woman clings to a romance that is dead. There is something morbid in women that makes them do it. It is like embracing a corpse."

"Shall I read it, sir?"

"No, no; don't bother. I know what is in it. On the third page she declares she hates me, and on the fifth she denies it. Myrtle runs so deucedly to form."

A look of relief crossed the rotund countenance of Mr. Sylvester as he took up the last letter. "It's from a society for educating the poor, sir."

"Tear it up. What we need is a society for educating the rich." Completely dressed, Montague turned round and struck an attitude. "It is my intention some day," he said with mock airiness, "to found a *Conservatoire Universelle*, where philanthropists will be taught charity, min-

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

isters of the gospel gain humility, musicians learn to feel, and newspaper writers take up the elements of language. Heavens! such scope as I should have! Stick your head out of the window and see if a taxi is waiting.”

Sylvester raised the window and surveyed the street below. “It’s there, sir,” he said, drawing his head in.

“Then I shall leave you. Mrs. Le Roy is giving a dinner-party this evening, and she invariably has guests who listen charmingly. Good-night, Sylvester.”

“Good-night, sir.”

When he was gone, William Sylvester scratched his thinly covered head. He then shrugged his shoulders, and followed this action by pouring out a glass of sherry. He took a sip. “’Eavens!” he said aloud; “’ow ’e do talk!”

## II

Montague leaned back in the taxicab and, enjoying that sense of contentment almost invariably engendered by a smooth-running vehicle,

allowed his mind to browse in the meadows of memory.

It was a process which gave him considerable pleasure, for he was a man who respected his own accomplishments—though given to satirical comment on those of others. Satisfaction with his past had bred in him a contentment with the present. . . . And he never doubted the future; for was not to-morrow merely to-day carried on?

There were many reasons tending towards his peace of mind. One: that he was twenty-eight years of age. At such a period in a man's life he meets older men on a footing of equality, and younger men with patronage. Women of all ages admire him, and their husbands ask him to lunch at their clubs. There is no age more gratifying to the vanity.

The man of twenty-eight is an Ambassador of Youth meeting the Plenipotentiaries of Age as an equal.

Unfortunately for Dennis Montague, he allowed his own excellent opinion of himself to deepen with the admiration of others until it completely outstripped all rivals. At twenty-six he had his first great love affair—with himself. At



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

twenty-eight it had ripened into a sort of reverence. Occasionally he flirted with women, but such incidents were mere inconstancies, peccadillos, which never seriously threatened his own overwhelming *affaire d'amour*.

Born in Ottawa, Dennis was the son of an ambitious mother and a high-placed Government official. Educated for the law, he had applied a dexterous intellect to that noble and musty study, and had succeeded in having himself called to the Bar when he was twenty-three. Up to that time he had known no other civilization than that found in the capital of his native land, where a peer of the realm, graciously appointed by the Imperial Government to act as interpreter between the Mother Country and the Dominion of Canada, regularly spends his appointed term at the Government House, thereby stimulating Ottawa's social activities to fever-heat. It even produces a philosophy of its own among the capital's tuft-hunters. For, even if *this* governor-general doesn't ask us to dinner, there's always a chance that the *next* one will.

Montague became a noted figure in Ottawa's younger social set, and, though he expressed con-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

tempt for all such things, found a certain gratification in seeing his name appear constantly in the social columns of the city's press. It was a soothing sensation to read the chronicle of his adolescent activities. . . . Few people can resist a glow of pleasure on seeing in the morning paper that they were where they were the previous evening.

Even in the remotest rural districts of America the weekly journal records that "Hank Wilson went over to Hiram Johnston's farm at Hen's Creek to see his new barn. Hiram Johnston is one of the most enterprising farmers that we got."

But—there is something solid about that barn.

After the legal profession had opened its portals to Montague he moved to Toronto, accepting a junior partnership in a firm of some standing. To his amazement, he found that in Toronto the *entrée* into the best circles—and he could not exist in any other—was more difficult than in Ottawa. Though both cities had that reverence for wealth which is universal, Toronto's large population made a sudden and successful *début* far from easy. There were so many sets—those

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

who yachted, danced, and golfed; those who danced and golfed; and those who merely golfed. Montague decided that the last class was too fatiguing.

Then there were those extraordinary people who practiced the arts in an amiable way. There is probably no city in the world where there exists more comfortable talent than in Toronto. For a time music was the occupation of musicians, but society embraced it, to the benefit of them both, with the result that musical homes abound.

This worried Montague. The younger set in Ottawa knew no such phenomena.

Looking farther afield, he next caught a glimpse of the University family, an after-growth of the larger life of Toronto 'Varsity. But he avoided that. His mind was dexterous, but needed lesser minds beside it to give it the sparkle of contrast.

In desperation he turned to the purely *nouveaux riches*, only to find that they had made entangling alliances with all the other fraternities.

There was only one well untapped—the Canadian Militia; but his mind rejected that at once.



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

He had always agreed with Disraeli that soldiering was fit only for fools in peace-time and for barbarians in times of war.

He joined the Royal Canadian Yacht Club.

His dinner-parties on the verandas of that beautiful place caused him to be noticed. A friend of his introduced him to one of the society reporters. He invited her to a dinner, and sent her home in a limousine.

Toronto wavered. He was certainly good-looking, and had not the "*C'est entendu*" column of one of the largest dailies recorded that "Mr. Dennis Montague's dinner-parties at the Yacht Club have a——" followed by several French words that were most impressive?

With the genius of a great general, he saw that the gates were unlocked. Now for some stroke to thrust them open! For two months he cogitated, and then one day it came to him with a flash, as ideas occasionally present themselves to authors.

He engaged Mr. Sylvester as a valet. Toronto society surrendered unconditionally.

It was not so much that Sylvester was a valet, but that he had a nice appreciation of effect.

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

Sometimes, when his master was playing tennis on the lawns of the Yacht Club, the unobtrusive servant would be seen patiently waiting outside the wire-screen, with a letter, or a suit-case, or some verbal question concerning domestic economy. Montague appeared annoyed and raised his salary.

But triumph is satisfying only if it leads to further victories; and Dennis began to cast about for some *rôle* which would distinguish him from his fellows. The death of his father handed on to him a yearly income which made his position secure; but he was not satisfied. It was then that he learned to scoff.

It was an experiment at first, but an immediately successful one. His brain, always keen and linked to a facile vocabulary, became focused on the unlovely task of ridiculing life; and as he was ever careful not to satirize the set with whom he was dining, his popularity became tremendous. By a process of catalogue culture he was able to talk on a variety of subjects; his method being that if one heard the waltz from *La Bohème*, one was entitled to discuss Puccini. One of Brangwyn's earlier efforts in a friend's

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

house was sufficient basis for him to pose as a judge of etchings. He read part of one book by a myriad of writers, then discarding their works, held forth on the authors themselves.

With young men of observant and creative minds there are two paths which, early in life's journey, offer puzzling deviation. To follow one (and to youth it seems the less attractive), a man must bend his faculties to the discovering and the interpreting of the beauty of life; the other leads to the annihilation of everything that is genuine and that can be used as a target for cynicism. Montague chose the second path, and spared nothing but himself.

Even when the war gripped the city, and one by one the little gods of puny social life crashed impotently to destruction, he continued his glittering way unperturbed. The war was young, and the 1st Canadian Division was merely holding the line somewhere near a place called Ypres. . . . The market for superficiality was still brisk.

The taxi came to a stop outside a lovely home in Chestnut Park, and, paying the driver, Montague mounted the steps and rang the bell.



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

“I wonder,” he mused, “who the deuce I shall have as a dinner partner?”

### III

After his usual apologies for tardiness, Montague led Mrs. Le Roy in to dinner, and like the seasoned campaigner he had become, glanced at the guests for conversational adversaries. His host and hostess were noisy and given to platitudes; there was a soft-voiced American from the South who seemed only anxious to be attentive and courteous to the woman next him; on the other side there was a young woman who was so consistently effusive that she was the most invited-out guest in Toronto—but never had a love affair; beside her was a young subaltern in an obviously new uniform. Montague had a vague idea that he had seen that well-groomed uninspired face in some bank. And he was right. Less than six months back the bank manager had written to the General Office about this youth—“He’s a decent enough fellow, but lacking in initiative.”

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Just beyond the subaltern Montague saw the finely chiseled features of Vera Dalton, and for some reason unknown to himself his color mounted as their eyes met. He had known her in Ottawa, though she had steadfastly avoided his friends, and later, when her parents had come to Toronto, he had seen her at odd intervals. He liked to think of her as an old friend, though there was something about her that made his flippancy difficult in her presence; but beyond their occasional meetings at certain houses, neither one had made any attempt to develop the friendship.

She was fair without being blond, and avoiding the riotous climax of color so tempting to fair women, she dressed in subtle shades, with colors suggested rather than displayed. Her face had a poise and a composure that had nothing in common with placidity; and she was feminine without being helpless or making a constant sex appeal. She had always interested Montague, and even though their conversations had consisted of neatly worded nothings, her memory had a habit of lingering with him in a way that disturbed his self-admiration. Two things he felt about her

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

—one, that she disliked him; the other, that he held some power over her.

He removed his eyes from hers, and, glancing for a moment at the remaining guests, who sat like a jury with Mr. Le Roy at the end as foreman, he drained his glass and leaped into the conversational ring with a vivacious effrontery that was startling. Naturally of high spirits and easily stimulated by applause, he juggled phrase and quotation, tossed words into the air, and, as though he were a conjurer, watched them link together into ideas. He held his listeners in wonder and challenged them all on subjects ranging from New Thought to the latest scandal. Once the American held him with a witty retort, but Montague feinted with an epigram and stabbed him with a paradox. On one occasion the newly created subaltern, stirred by wine and a certain courage derived from his khaki, threw a truism into the arena in the hope that it would trip the talker, but Montague, catching it on the point of his wit, twirled it about, and hurled it at its source, laughing as the discomfited young officer retired behind the barriers of self-conscious silence.



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

His hearers applauded by look and word, and Mrs. Le Roy whispered to her servant to keep Montague's glass full. . . . She was delighted. . . . She had never seen him glitter so.

And Montague noted the applause, emptying his glass again and again; but it was neither wine nor the incense of flattery that had stirred his pulse to such energy. . . . In that glance from Vera's eyes he had read a truth. His power, whatever it was, had mastered her dislike, and he knew that in the evening before him she would bend in his arms as the bow yields to the strength of the archer.

### IV

After dinner they danced. Mrs. Le Roy was not a gifted hostess, but she acted on the principle that food, wine and music—provided the food and the wine were high-class, and the music was not—would make any evening a success. Few of her guests disagreed with her; their feet and their tongues were light, and they danced and talked without self-consciousness or mental effort.

Twice Montague had danced with the girl, but

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

it amused him to leave her each time with some mocking pleasantry, the only answer to the smoldering question of her eyes. It was nearly midnight when he led her, almost without asking, into the deserted recess of the Le Roy's conservatory, and, beckoning her to a settee, sat down beside her. With her hands clasped on her lap she gazed fixedly at the shadowy garden showing outside.

Montague looked at her, and his eyes grew bright as they noted her poise, tempered by fear of him. He leaned over and rested his hand on hers.

"Please don't," she said quietly, making no effort to withdraw her own.

"Women always say 'don't,' " he said. "I suppose they enjoy a sort of preliminary *tête-à-tête* with conscience before committing an indiscretion."

"But I mean it, Dennis."

"All women mean it, my dear Vera."

Her color deepened, and she tried to release her hands from his, but his grip tightened until it hurt. She made no further attempt, and he moved still closer to her.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"Please let me go," she said, keeping her eyes steadily from him.

"You are inartistic."

"But I ask you—and you are a gentleman." Something of the dislike that he had always known she felt for him crept into her voice and left a nice tinge of irony.

"I have a valet and three addresses," he said, "and only pay my tailor once a year. . . . In most countries that gives one the standing of a gentleman."

She bit her lip and glanced quickly at him. His pulses, already stirred by wine and the intrigue of a midnight amour, leaped into a fever at the glimpse of burning eyes and lips that slightly trembled. He placed his hand on her shoulder and drew her face towards his.

"Why," she said hesitatingly—"why do you want to kiss me?"

Montague smiled. "The eternal question, Vera. It has trapped more men into proposals than all the wiles of a generation of fond mothers."

"But you don't love me," she said, her hands



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

pressed against the lapels of his jacket in self-defense.

"On such a night as this," he said, "who could help but love you?"

"Dennis, please let me go—I mean it—I shall call for help."

His brow contracted with a sudden frown. "You come here," he said, "at midnight—into a deserted conservatory . . . with me. Then, because I do what you knew from the start I would do, you suddenly decide to play 'Little Miss Prude from the Convent.'"

"I—I should not have come. I did not want to, Dennis."

His lips curved into a smile. "Then why did you?"

Her eyes pleaded with him not to prolong the scene, but he was mad with the joy of seeing this sensitive woman, who had so long kept him at a distance, caught in the meshes of his fascination, and he held her in his arms, confident of his power to sway her at his will.

"I fought against it, Dennis," she said quickly. "But—I had to come. Oh, why force me to say

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

such a thing. Can you not see how unfair you are?"

She struggled to her feet, but he stood before her, barring the way to the door.

His breath came faster. This was a charming surrender! It had gracefulness, novelty, charm. . . . Only, something in her eyes warned him to come no closer.

"I have admitted, Dennis Montague," she said breathlessly, "that I came here because you fascinated me. It's true; you have always fascinated me. But I tell you that down in my heart I loathe you, detest you, for the coward that you are." Montague drew back as though fired upon by a masked battery. "In all the years I have known you," she went on furiously, as though fearing that her courage would leave her before the finish, "you have done nothing that was not selfish, mean, and cowardly—above everything else, cowardly. Look at the girls you have known——" Montague interrupted her with an impatient gesture, but she went on: "More than a dozen I could name have given you the depth and the sweetness of their first love, inspired by you, called forth by you. Do you realize what

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

a woman's heart is and what she gives with it? And you—you are too cowardly to face marriage, too cowardly to love with your own heart—too selfish to leave women's hearts alone."

Montague took a cigarette-case from his pocket. "May I smoke?" he said coolly.

"You are a coward about your profession as well," she hurried on, ignoring his interruption. "Your mother, I know, had great dreams for you. She planned, worked, sacrificed for you. Yet you are too much of a coward seriously to face competition with what you choose to call 'the little legal minds of the city.' "

"And thirdly?" he said, lighting a cigarette.

"Yes, thirdly," she said desperately, although his easy nonchalance was fast undermining her courage, "you are not in the army. Yet no one could say that Dennis Montague is not fit. I can only presume, like every one else, that you are afraid."

"And lastly?" He was still calm, although keener eyes than hers would have noticed a dark, ominous flush under his eyes.

"And, lastly," she said, unconsciously repeating his formula, "you scoff at everything that is



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

good and pure, sneering at religion, and drawing yourself aside from your fellow-creatures as though they were loathsome. Yet I say to you, Dennis, that there is not a man in the slums whose soul isn't far, far richer than yours. It is only a coward, afraid to face the real things, who scoffs at life."

Weak from the effort she had made, her voice subsided into silence and a cold sweat broke out on her brow and the palms of her hands.

"Will you smoke, Vera?"

"No, thanks," she answered faintly.

"Do. It would soothe you."

"No, I thank you." She repressed a sudden desire to fly from the conservatory. She had become suddenly afraid of the cool, smiling figure beside her.

"As far as girls are concerned," he said quietly, replacing the cigarette-case in his pocket, "just as long as they angle for us with every artifice of dress and rouge and coquetry, so long will they catch us and the consequences. As for the law, which my mother planned for me, I regret that my father left me the instincts of a

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

gentleman, not of an attorney. I am not boring you?"

She made no reply.

"As for the army, I don't happen to be interested in the war. I disapprove of the crudeness of our Canadian civilization. I disapprove of England's lack of the artistic. I disapprove of German militarism, Scotch bagpipes, Swiss cheese, Chinese laundries, and American politics. Why should I fight for one when I disapprove of them all? As for my fellow-man, I shun the ordinary man of the streets because he does not think, read, or bathe often enough. I am not hostile to him; I merely ignore him. I am not a coward at all, my dear Vera; I am merely an artist among artisans."

He bowed gracefully. "Let us return to the dancing," he said.

With a frightened, inquiring glance, she took his arm, and without a word they left the conservatory. At the door of the ballroom they paused, and she laid a timid hand on his arm. It will ever be a mystery to men how women can love and despise the same object.

"Dennis," she said, "will you try to forget

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

what I have said?" Her courage had gone, fled before his coolness and the fascination he held for her, though she had striven with all her womanhood to free herself from it.

"I wish to Heaven I could," he said grimly.

### V

The morning sunshine invaded the rooms of Dennis Montague with pervading cheeriness. It was nearing the end of April, and a hundred birds sang of the winter wonders of arid Africa, and of the witcheries of the Nile, where Pygmies are at war with the butterflies, and the great god Memnon raises his mighty shout to greet the dawn of day.

Oblivious to the sunshine and everything but his thoughts, Montague lay in bed, and sought to wrestle with the truth he had heard the night before. It was impossible to dismiss the thing from his mind. His brain throbbed with resentment, questioning, searching her words—striving to convince himself that her charge of cowardice was the vituperation of an unrequited love. But it was useless. He could explain her actions,



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

dissect her motives, applaud his own pose, but he could not eliminate the feeling of personal nausea which clung to him, as though he had suddenly sickened of his whole nature.

A knock at the door interrupted the thread of his thoughts, and his valet entered with a tray of breakfast-things.

“Good morning, sir.” Sylvester carefully rearranged the tray on a little table beside the bed. “It’s a beautiful morning, sir. There’s great news too.”

“What is it?”

“Canadians ’ave saved Calais, sir—leastways they’ve stopped them for the time.”

“They’re in action, eh?”

“’Orrible, too, sir; the paper says the Germans used poison gas.”

“Good God!”

“Yes, sir—the French Colonials gave way, yelling that ’ell was let loose, and the Canadians went up and ’eld the line.”

Montague put down the cup of coffee untasted. “What does it say—about casualties?”

“Why, sir it looks as if some battalions was pretty well wiped out. ’Ere’s the paper, sir——”

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"No—no. I don't want to see it. Tell me—it says . . . the Canadians held against . . . gas?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are our Toronto chaps in it?"

"Very 'eavy, sir. It seems as if the 'Ighland Brigade got it the worst."

Montague sank back on the pillow, his face grim and pallid.

"Come along, sir; 'ere's your breakfast."

His master gazed at the ceiling. "Sylvester," he said listlessly, "for a long time you have ministered to my body. What can you do for a soul that is starving?"

The valet beamed reassuringly. A large and varied experience as a servant to young gentlemen had inured him to morning-after repentances.

"That's all right, sir," he said, rubbing his hands genially. "A bromo-seltzer will fix you up. 'Ello, sir!" The sound of a military band drew him to the window. "It's one of the new battalions—blooming near a thousand of them. Seems like 'ome, it does, when the Guards used to do London in all their swankin' regimentals."

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

A battalion swung past in steady rhythmical tread to the stirring strains of the Welsh hymn of freedom, "Men of Harlech"—and there was a youthful vigorousness about the men, a suggestion of unconquerable manhood. . . . And on every man's face there was written pride and determination. For their comrades had been tried at Ypres. . . . They had held the line. . . . And, by the living God, the Hun would pay for that foul gas given to the wind to carry against defenseless men.

The last ranks of the battalion passed, and the music ceased as suddenly as it had come. The birds resumed their chorus, and William Sylvester his imperturbable mask of deference. Languidly Montague rose from his bed and lit a cigarette.

"Our civilization," he said quietly, "need not pride itself on raising those men. Men have always been brave since the beginning of time. The terrible failure of our age is that it has produced men like me—a coward."

Mr. Sylvester scratched his head. "Lord bless me, sir!" he ventured, "you're not a coward."



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Why, look at the jump you took at last year's horse show."

Montague turned on him with a vehemence that the valet had never before seen in his master. "I tell you I am a coward," he said fiercely. "Don't I know that my place is with these men? In that battalion that passed there are married men with families, there are only sons of widows, there are brothers, sweethearts. Who is there to care if I go? My death would not cause a single tear; and yet I stay—not that I am afraid of bullets or death, but because I know that I should have to sleep beside men who are filthy, unclean, and that I should grow filthy too. I abhor it. I detest it. Yet I stand aside and let others go."

"You—you are a gentleman, sir."

"A gentleman!" Montague laughed raspingly. "My own definition last night was 'a man with a valet and three addresses.' What a fool I was! No, I am not a gentleman. I have never been one. The greatest gentleman of all time was a carpenter. That is the truth I have to burn into my soul."

He sank into a chair, and shadows of fatigue

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

marred his face. "Last night, Sylvester," he said slowly, "I lay awake for hours, and sometimes in the awful darkness that surrounds one when sleep refuses to come, things seem clearer and more cruel than in daylight. Last night I saw myself for the first time. . . . I do not say I shall change. . . . It is too late, I think. . . ."

An hour later he left his flat, fully dressed, and strolled into the sun-lit streets. A newsboy dashed past, screaming in strident tones, "All night fighting—Canadian Line still holding;" and then, apparently feeling the announcement needed identification, he shrieked, "All about that great big European War."

Montague heard his name spoken. It was the ex-bank clerk, the young subaltern with the uninspired face.

"Good-bye," he said rather shyly.

"Where are you going?"

"Marching orders," said the other. "We leave here to-morrow. By jove, we've got something to fight for now!"

Montague murmured his best wishes and moved on, but the words that kept running through his brain were those of the boy's man-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

ager who had written "A decent enough fellow, but lacking in initiative."

### VI

His walk, unplanned as it was, drew him towards the center of the city. He mechanically avoided the streets that were crowded, and, like a bit of flotsam on the ocean's surface, was guided and buffeted until, turning down a quiet side-street, he emerged upon the corner of a huge stone building. He glanced up, to realize that it was the Armories and was about to change his course when a recruiting sergeant, noticing his hesitation, stepped up to him.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but was you lookin' to sign up?"

"Sign up?" Montague repeated the words automatically.

"Sure—sign up with the Brindle's Battalion."

"The Brindle's Battalion?"

"Come off that parrot stuff," growled Sergeant Saunders.

Montague shook himself together. "I beg your pardon," he said stiffly.



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

The sergeant shuffled uneasily. "Say, don't be so dashed polite," he said, not ill-naturedly. "I'm here to get recruits. We're a tough bunch; we're a rough bunch; but we're men. Our boys ain't strong on polish or eddication, and they're no boozeless, non-smoking crowd; but they're straight, and they're game, and they're men."

"They're men," repeated Montague, dazed by a dizziness that seemed to wrap himself and the sergeant in an enveloping mist.

"That's what I said," reiterated Sergeant Saunders, mentally noting that he would make Montague drop his sing-song if he ever got the opportunity. "What do you say, old scout?"

Montague glanced up. "Will you take me?" he said.

"Will we take you?" A broad, brown hand grasped Montague's arm, and he found himself being led into a room in the Armories, where he discovered that his full name was Dennis Oliver Montague, that he was twenty-eight years of age, that he was an Anglican, and that his Uncle Charles was his next of kin. He further found that he was the property of His Majesty King George the Fifth for the duration of the war

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and six months after. "So 'elp me; and shove 'im in to the medico.—Glad you signed up, my lad; you'll never regret it. We've got a man's job for you, and—close that bleeding door, Nokes.—All right.—*Next!*"

With whirlwind rapidity Dennis stripped for the doctor, who pronounced him an excellent example of cannon-fodder; and, still dazed, he put on his clothes and emerged into the open air, a red band about his arm proclaiming to the world that he was now Private D. O. Montague, of the Brindle's Battalion, C.E.F. He gasped, shrugged his shoulders, then went home.

## VII

Sergeant Skimps surveyed the squad of recruits with the eye of a man who had seen recruits for twenty years and was impervious to any emotion on the subject.

"You're soldiers now," he began, his dialect strongly reminiscent of Bow Bells; "you're in the service now, so, kiss me, 'Arry, get your 'air cut, all of yer. We don't go in for Paderooskies in the harmy. Then 'old yer 'eads hup and put

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

yer chests hout has though you was somebody. You ain't, but don't go tellin' no one." (A gentle murmur greeted this sally.) "Halways respeck yer hofficers and non-commissioned hofficers, and don't go slapping the colonel on the back and hofferin' 'im a cigar. You're in the harmy—that bloke at the hend, spit out that there tobacco—g'wan!—a filthy 'abit on parade, and it'll get C.B. for yer. Where do you 'ail from, hany'ow?—a nice specimen, I don't think—chewing when a sawgeant's talking to yer. Now, then, fall in—hanother 'arf-hour's drill."

For five hours that day alternately Sergeant Skimps talked, and his tired squad turned, marched, and wheeled about the gravel parade-ground. Weary to the point of exhaustion, already deaf to the interminable harangue of Sergeant Skimps, the hour of four-thirty found Montague with his first day in the army finished. He had only one desire—to seek his apartment, to feel the cool shower upon his body, and to lounge in languid repose in his dressing-gown, soothed by the inevitable cigarette. He broke away from the group, but was hailed by a ruddy-



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

faced Little Englander, who had made various overtures to him during the day.

"Going up?" said the other, his accent proclaiming his British birth, tempered by ten years of Canadian citizenship.

"Yes," said Montague; "but I'm in a hurry."

"Right-o! I'm with you." He swung along beside Montague. "This is the life," he said cheerily.

"What?" asked Montague.

"Soldiering—a dollar ten a day, short hours, and no work—what ho!"

"Do you mean to say you like it?" asked Montague, wishing his companion reeked a little less of his recent exertions.

"Why not like it?" said Private Waller. "We're in it, ain't we?"

"I suppose so," said the other shortly.

Private Waller rubbed his hands together. "He's a sergeant, ain't he?"

"Do you mean that strutting bounder who drilled us to-day?"

"Lordee! don't let him hear you say that." The little man went pale at the thought. "Say,

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

if you don't like him, just wait until you see Sergeant-Major 'Awkins."

A cockney of even ten years' Canadian citizenship loses his h's when excited. Montague began to wince under it, and wished a dozen times that his companion would hold his tongue and give him a chance to think, to separate the varied experiences of the day, and to edit his thoughts. He shrugged his shoulders and acknowledged the greeting of Mrs. Merryweather from a huge motor-car. Waller's eyes bulged.

"I say, you know some swells, don't you? What was you—a chauffeur?"

Montague considered. "No; I was a sort of social buffoon."

Waller considered. "Something in the plumbing line?" he ventured.

"Not exactly," answered Montague, and muttered, "Duration of the war—and six months after—with plebs like this!"

"I'm a carpenter by trade," vouchsafed Private Waller, and then emitted a shout of delight. "I say," he cried; "blime, if it ain't the missus!"

In a few moments they reached a little Englishwoman, not much more than a girl, who was

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

guiding a baby-carriage containing a chubby little youngster of some two years of age.

“’Ello, Bill!” she said. “’Ow’s the army?”

“Great,” said her husband; “but meet my pal, Private Montague.—Private Montague, meet my old woman.”

“Glad to know any friend of Bill’s,” said Mrs. Waller warmly.

Montague bowed. “Thank you,” he said gravely. “You are giving up a lot in letting your husband go to the war.”

“You said I had to, Emily.”

The girl pouted. “’E would go.”

“But you wanted to go, Bill.”

“Of course; but I said——”

“I know—about the biby; but——”

“There you go again. Didn’t you say I must?”

“Oh, well, Mr. Montague”—the little woman looked frankly into his gray-blue, unreadable eyes—“the biby’s a boy, and when he grows up I cawn’t say to ’im, ‘’Arry, your father was a slacker!’ Now, can I, Mr. Montague?”

He made no answer, but a thoughtful look crept into the hard, unsmiling eyes.



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

"Come and have a bit of supper, pard?" Private Waller rubbed his hands together at the prospect.

"No—no, thanks," said Montague hastily. He was longing for privacy and the solace that comes with solitude. "Some other night, perhaps, when we have our uniforms."

"Good enough!" cried the cheery little man. "Then we'll do Queen Street together and show the girls—what ho—oh no!"

Montague raised his hat. "Good evening," he said.

"So long," said Private Waller. "See you in the morning."

When they were alone the husband turned to his young wife with an air of pride. "What do you think of my pal?" he asked, with an air of proprietorship.

"G'wan," said Emily disdainfully; "'e ain't your pal."

"He is, too."

"'E ain't!" She tossed her head. "Don't I know one when I sees one; me, the daughter of a footman in Lady Swankbourne's? 'E your pal! 'E blooming well ain't —'e's a *gentleman*!"

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Far up the street Montague was striding towards his home, wondering if any one had seen him with the Wallers, or had heard the garrulous little cockney call him pard. Good heavens! what would his friends say; or, for that matter, how could he face Sylvester if he had been seen by that polite scion of servitude? "But I'll see it through," he muttered savagely, biting his lip, "if only to prove that the under-dog, like all other dogs, is a thing without a soul!"

### VIII

It was early in November about eighteen months later that Vera Dalton, returning from her self-imposed task at a Military Convalescent Home, found a letter awaiting her which bore the heading that will cast its unique spell over us and our children for generations to come—"Somewhere in France."

Sorrow had come into her home, as it had into so many hundreds of others, but it had mellowed, not marred her womanliness.

Into the vortex of the nations she had seen the young men of Canada flinging themselves with

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

laughing voices and sturdy courage. With the other women of the city she had watched the endless stream of youth as though, across the seas, some Hamelin Piper were playing an irresistible, compelling melody. . . . And still the cry was for more—more sons, more brothers, more fathers! Month after month the ceaseless crusade went on — month after month new battalions sprang into being, trained a short time, and then made for the sea. . . . Always the sea, waiting with its foaming restlessness to carry its human cargo to the slaughter.

The sea . . . the sea. . . .

It became the symbol of sacrifice to her. Across its turbulent expanse, youth was forfeiting its life for the blindness of the past. The hungry fire of war was being fed with human hearts. . . . But such is the nature of fire that what lives through it is imperishable.

A year ago Montague had gone with his battalion—without even a good-bye. She had never heard of him, but the ordeal of the flames had left him stripped of his artificiality as a tree stricken by a sudden frost is robbed in a moment of its foliage. It is not only the best in men that



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

lives through war—vile passions vie with courage and great sacrifice. . . . But artificial things succumb and crumple with the scorching heat, and are blown into space by the breath of passions, base or noble—it matters not—they are *real*.

With trembling hands she opened the letter.

“SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

“MY DEAR GIRL,—In a couple of hours we are going over the parapet to reach the German lines or gain oblivion—or worse. All around me the men I have worked with, slept with, fought with, are writing to, or thinking of, some loved one at home. I do not know whether the love you once felt for me has died or not, but it was once strong enough to hurt me as no one had ever done before—to tear my soul out to where I could see its rottenness with my own eyes. I could not live with myself after that, and as you must have heard, for I believe it was a drawing-room jest for some time, I joined a battalion composed almost entirely of men from the factories, the workshops, and the streets.

“It was partly a spirit of bravado made me do

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

it, and partly a desire to wrestle with truth. I cannot say how hard it was at first to endure their company, their incessant, meaningless profanity. I hated every one of them. To salute an officer in the street caused me such humiliation that I thought of desertion a dozen times. From my contempt of my fellow-soldiers to an understanding of their nobility has been a hard, cruel road to travel; but I have traveled it, and I think that somewhere on the road there is a cross whereon my pride was crucified. Vera, my prayer is no longer that of the Pharisee, but of the Publican. I was offered a commission; I was urged to join the signalers or the machine-gun section, because there I should find men more after my own stamp; but I refused—the memory of your words made me stick with the men I started with.

“I have found them crude, uneducated, unambitious, but true as steel, and asking no better reward for their heroism than that their ‘missus and kids’ will be looked after at home. I tell you, Vera, that when the war is over we shall have to realize that it is not only the consumptive and the imbecile that deserve care and

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

thought. There is a grandeur, a manhood, in the ordinary, unlovely, unkempt man of the streets that our civilization has failed to bring out, but war has done it. So much has war given to us; so much has peace failed to give.

"Life has become a riddle to me, still fascinating, but fascinatingly puzzling. Perhaps I shall find the answer in No Man's Land.

"Good-bye, dear girl. Don't think from the tone of my letter that I have forgotten how to smile (this is where real humor is found, for humor was always a twin to tragedy). But I am forgetting how to scoff. I suppose, though, that I haven't changed beyond recognition, for I believe behind my back I am called 'The Duke.'

"Like my comrades, I have written to a loved one at home.

"I trust, Vera, that it is *au revoir*.

DENNIS.

"D. O. Montague, Pte. No. 67,895,  
Brindle's Battalion, C.E.F."



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

### IX

"Four minutes!" A subaltern, who had reached the Brindle's Battalion only the night before, stood with his back to the parapet, his wrist turned so that he could study the face of his watch. Half-a-dozen rifles spat at the German trench opposite. The attack was to be a surprise, without preliminary artillery fire.

"Three minutes!" There was a slight catch in the lieutenant's voice as he watched the ominous course of the hand of his watch ticking off the seconds. Dennis Montague turned to look at him, wondering where he had seen him before, and idly conjecturing how he had earned that little splash of color on his breast.

A signaler looked up from his phone. "O.C. wants to know if everything is ready, sir."

"Two minutes! Has every man his gas-helmet, water-bottle, iron ration? Right. Tell the O.C. everything's O.K."

There was a coarse jest from a grizzled corporal; a few laughed nervously. A little chap, who had lied about his age, caught his breath in

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

a sob he could not stifle. The young officer, who was beside him, reached out his hand and patted the lad's shoulder.

"One minute!" Every man crouched for the spring—there was a mumbled prayer—a curse—a laugh. Montague took a deep, quivering breath, and his trembling hand felt for the bayonet-stud to see that it was firm.

"Come on, Brindles! Give 'em hell!" The subaltern leaped to the parapet, stood silhouetted a moment against the dull, cloudy sky, and, without a word, fell back into the trench—a corpse. And in that moment Montague remembered him. He was the "decent enough fellow"—"lacking in initiative."

Cursing, shouting, laughing, the men scrambled over the breastwork, and were met by a torrent of machine-gun fire that swept through their ranks with pitiless accuracy.

"Something's wrong!" yelled Major Watson from the center. "They knew we were coming;" and he whirled around twice and dropped in his tracks. Montague leaped forward with a hoarse, inarticulate shout, when he felt a blow on his arm as though it had been struck by a red-hot iron.

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

He fell, but rose immediately, madly excited, muttering words that meant nothing. The charge had stopped halfway, and all about him his comrades stood irresolute, desperate, unable to advance, determined not to retreat.

“Come on,” shrieked the adjutant, “for God’s sake!” And he fell, choking, vomiting blood, with a bullet in his throat.

Without an officer left, the men looked wildly about, the bullets spitting around them and taking their steady, merciless toll. With a great feeling of ecstasy, Montague staggered to the front.

“Steady, the Brindles!” he yelled hoarsely. “Shake out the line to the left—cold steel, Brindles! Come on!”

“Follow the Duke!” roared a dozen voices; and they hurled themselves forward.

They hacked their way into the trench, but their triumph was short-lived. Things had gone badly on the left, and the signal to retire flashed along the line. With horrible blaspheming, the Brindles gave up their trench and started back for their own line. When he was half-way across a bullet struck Montague in the shoulder, then



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

another in the thigh, and he sank to the ground unconscious.

When he awoke the moonlight was streaming over the stricken field. He bit his lip to keep from crying out at the sudden spasm of pain in his shoulder, and then something he saw almost stopped the beating of his heart. A figure was slowly crawling towards him, inch by inch, but steadily, ominously coming nearer with every moment. His left arm was helpless, and he tried to reach for his bayonet by turning over.

“Pard, are you dead?”

Never did sounds of sweetest music fall more gratefully on human ears than the words uttered by Private Waller on the night of October 16, 1916, on No Man’s Land, Somewhere in France.

“Thank God!” cried Montague, his voice weak and quavering. “Waller—old—boy.”

“Damn!” muttered Private Waller. The Germans, with customary fiendishness, were searching the ground with rifle-fire to prevent any attempt at rescue. “Are you much hurt, pard?”

“I’m used up pretty bad,” Montague answered weakly, and in incorrect English. Things change in No Man’s Land.

## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

"I'm the third as has come after you," whispered Waller; "Sykes and Thompson got theirs."

"Coming—for me?" Montague's voice trailed off into a querulous sob.

"Sure—those of us as got back shook hands on it that we'd get the Duke back dead or alive."

Montague tried to speak, but only two scalding tears slowly trickled down his cheeks. He was weak from loss of blood, and he was learning a bitter lesson in the moonlight on the stricken field.

"I'll hoist you up as easy as I can," whispered Private Waller eagerly, "and I'll sort of crawl; and if they spot us, I'll let you down easy. Come on, pard."

Fifty yards—that was all—but fifty yards of unspeakable agony. The blood flowed again from Dennis's wounds and matted over Waller's hair. A dozen times he would have fainted, but he grit his teeth, and crawling, grasping, falling, Waller took him to the edge of the trench. And then a bullet caught the little man, and he dropped.

"Good-bye, pard," he said.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

So died Private W. Waller, of His Majesty's Canadian Expeditionary Force.

### X

Almost a year later, a one-armed man was walking along a quiet street in the northern suburbs of a great Canadian city. He paused at a pretty little cottage that nestled in a well-kept garden to speak to a young woman whose black dress was mute testimony to her tragic bereavement.

"'Ow can I ever thank you, Mr. Montague," she said, "for giving me this cottage and going guardian to little 'Arry? And your wife, too, is that kind and beautiful that after she comes—and she is in and out nearly hevery day—I feel as if an angel had been 'ere. Well, if here ain't little 'Arry with his face all dirty!"

A sturdy urchin stumbled forward, and in some way the one-armed man hoisted him to his shoulder.

"Hello, pard!" said Montague.

The little chap chuckled and pulled at his hat.

"I often wonders," said the little mother, "why



## THE MAN WHO SCOFFED

you always calls him 'pard.' Bill used to call you his pard, but I knew all along you wasn't. You was a gentleman, Mr. Montague."

"Mrs. Waller," said Montague, and his voice was very low and soft, "I lay one night, wounded and dying, on No Man's Land. Your husband came for me, and he called me 'pard,' and he died for me. Perhaps you may understand a little of—what it means to me now."

Tears, bitter tears, the heritage of war. Mrs. Waller wept silently, and Montague's eyes looked past the garden, past the countryside, and saw neither trees nor houses, but a strip of land guarded by wire entanglements, and two lines of trenches where men lived, and laughed, and learned, and died.

\* \* \* \* \*

A little later the same one-armed man stood at a gate that gave entrance to a splendid lawn. It was his home, and as he stood for a moment drinking in the calm and peace of Nature at sundown, a girl emerged from the house and came towards him with outstretched hands.

Wonderfully happy, maimed, but filled with deep content, Dennis Montague, the man who

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

had scoffed, went forward to meet his wife, the girl who had had the courage to hurt the thing she loved. And the deepening rays of the setting sun spread a golden carpet for them to walk upon.

# THE AIRY PRINCE

## I

ON a hillock that overlooked a mill-stream in Picardy, a girl of sixteen was lying, face downwards, reading a book. The noise of the water tumbling over the chute was a song to which her ears had grown accustomed, but more than once she looked up as the October wind rose and fell in a chromatic whine. A dark, thickening cloud crept sullenly towards the earth, throwing its shadow on her book.

She gazed up at it and sighed.

A black cat, his green eyes glowing suspiciously in the fading light, stalked from the mill-house and furtively watched a wanton leaf that was flirting hilariously with the autumn breeze, until, still coquetting, it was caught by the stream and carried to destruction.

The cat's teeth showed for a moment in a



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

sinister grin. Cautiously measuring each step, he climbed to the top of the hillock, crouched suspiciously as a blade of grass moved in the wind, then scampered boldly up to the girl and settled ostentatiously upon the open pages of the book, for a siesta.

“*Tiens!*” The girl started, laughingly caught the offender by the ear, and pulled him to one side. “Louis, you have very bad manners,” she said, speaking in French. “You come so, without asking permission, and you go to sleep on *The Fairy Prince*. Wake up, Louis! To you I am speaking.”

The cat opened his eyes, bent them on her with a reproving look, and slowly closed them once more.

“Louis! Wake up—listen! I will read to you *The Fairy Prince*, and if you go to sleep I’ll have you gr-r-r-r-ound into black flour. See there now!”

Louis scratched his ear with a hind paw, rubbed his nose with a fore one, sneezed, opened his eyes to their widest, and generally indicated that he was thoroughly awake—in fact, was not likely ever to sleep again in this world. His little

## THE AIRY PRINCE

mistress gathered her shawl more tightly about her shoulders, and, crossing one foot over the other, shifted her position to secure the acme of comfort.

“Now then, my friend, attention! This is all about a little girl—like me, Louis, only she was pretty. Tell me, Louis, am I pretty, eh? Stop yawning when I ask you a question. You sleep almost all day and all night, and when you do wake up—you yawn. Pouf! Such laziness! So—this is the story. This little girl, she lived like me in a house away, ever so far away, from everything, and she was very unhappy. You understand, Louis, she was so lonesome. And every night she would cry herself to sleep—as I do sometimes, because—because—— Wake up, you wicked cat!”

The feline culprit stretched his paws and sat up rigidly, like a slumbering worshiper in church who has been detected in the act, but tries to indicate that he has merely been lost in contemplation of the preacher's theme. The girl frowned at Louis, and, laughing gaily, rubbed her cheek against his head.

Her laugh had hardly ended when, as her ear

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

caught the note of melancholy in the wind, she looked up, and her face, which had hovered a moment before between a frown and a smile, was shadowed by a musing expression that left her eyes dreamy and her lips drooping in the slightest and most sensitive of curves. Her dark hair, rippling into curls, fell back from a forehead whose fullness and whiteness added to the spiritual innocence of her countenance. Without being faultless, her face had an elusive mobility of expression that altered with each mood as swiftly as the surface of a pool lying exposed to the caprices of an April morning.

“Is it not a pretty story, Louis?” Of a sudden the filmy dreaminess of her eyes had lifted, and their dark-brown depths sparkled with life. “I am so glad at the convent they made me learn to read. But it is dreadfully difficult, my friend—there are such big words, you see. Well, Louis, this little girl went one day for a walk to the top of a hill—but you shall hear exactly how it is.”

She carefully found the place in the book, and, with a finger following each line in case she should miss any of it, proceeded to read in that ecstatic and unreal style of voice inevitable to



## THE AIRY PRINCE

young people when uttering other thoughts than their own.

“ ‘. . . Reaching the top of the hill, the most beautiful little girl in the world, whose eyes were brighter than stars, and whose lips were redder than the heart of a rose’ (like me, Louis—yes?) ‘sat down on a fallen tree and started to sing a song which she had learned from a solitary shepherd near her home.’—It does not say, Louis, but I think, perhaps, the music goes like this:

“ ‘Maman, dites moi ce qu’on sent quand on aime.  
Est-ce plaisir, est-ce tourment?  
Je suis tout le jour dans une peine extrême,  
Et la nuit, je ne sais comment.  
Si quelqu’un près. . . .

“ ‘And just then she saw a handsome cavalier approaching on foot.’ (Is it not exciting, Louis?) ‘He was tall and young, and was the bravest soldier in all France. He was so brave and handsome that every one called him “The Fairy Prince” ’—Listen, Louis, to the wind.”

The lowering clouds threw black shadows over the fields; the hurrying water of the mill-stream turned the color of ink as it made, shudderingly, for the fall of the chute. Through the ominous

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

rise and fall of the October wind came the sound of an aeroplane in the clouds, to be lost a moment later in a boisterous rush of wind that swept the girl's tresses.

"Come, Louis, under my shawl—so! It is cold, is it not? As soon as we finish this part of the story, we shall go in by the stove and work until bed-time, then . . . Do you ever dream, Louis?"

The black cat opened one green eye and closed it with the solemnity of an all-understanding wink.

"I often dream, my cat"—again the wistfulness lingered about her face—"and always it is of the world that is past the village. . . . Is it that I must stay here and never, never, see that world but when I dream? *Voyons*—what has all this to do with the Fairy Prince? I continue, Louis: 'As soon as the handsome cavalier saw the loveliest little girl in all the country, he came towards her. . . .'"

The droning sound grew louder. She looked up and watched the dark billows of clouds hovering over the fields, when, suddenly, through the heavy, underhanging mist, an aeroplane ap-

peared, descended swiftly towards the earth, straightened out its course, and soared into the clouds again.

She could hear the whirring of the machine as it circled round and round, like an angry hornet outside its nest that has been entered by an invader. The sound of the engine grew increasingly loud; again the mists parted as foam from the prow of a ship, and again the aeroplane swooped towards the earth. She could almost make out the features of the helmeted occupant, when, with a deafening roar, the machine checked its downward flight, and rose once more until the clouds took it to their bosom and hid it from sight.

“Louis!” Her voice shook. “I am frightened. Louis, we will go in and pray to the Virgin, you and I. It may be an *Allemand*, and, so ’tis said, they eat little girls—and black cats too.”

The whir-r of the engines grew angry with intensity, then fainter as the machine rose to a greater height. Suddenly the droning ceased. The tumbling waters of the chute seemed insistently loud, as though jealous of the brawling monster that had dared to challenge its incessant



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

song. The girl had just stooped to resume her book when, above the whining breeze, there was a sound like that of a saw-mill she had once heard in Étrun—but it came from the air—far over by the village road.

With a catch of her breath, she saw the aeroplane pierce the mists once more, and realized that it was pointing towards her as it descended. Rising to her feet, she pressed her hand against her mouth to keep from screaming, while ominously, noiselessly (but for an occasional hum such as wires give on a frosty night), the giant bird sped lower and nearer.

“Louis!” she cried. “Louis!”

Weak with terror, she grasped for the cat, to find that that ungallant protector had bolted ingloriously to the mill-house. Unable to move, she watched the monster as it touched the earth, bounded lightly, felt the ground a second time, and staggered unevenly over a rise in the ground. There was a final Wagnerian crescendo of the engines, and the aeroplane stopped, motionless, less than fifty yards from her.

The aviator climbed from the pilot's seat and looked about with a puzzled air. He was dressed

## THE AIRY PRINCE

in a leather coat which reached to the top of his riding-boots, and his head was encased in a leather helmet. Raising his goggles, he looked toward the mill-house, and, for the first time, caught sight of the girl.

For a moment he hesitated, then made towards her, taking an extraordinary length of pace for one of his medium build, and raising his knees, as a bather will do when wading through surf. He paused, irresolute, about five yards from her, saluted, unbuckled a strap, and removed his helmet with a carelessness that left his generous supply of light-brown hair standing straight up like the quills of a porcupine. His face was rather long, and, except for his eyes, which twinkled humorously, bore a look of exaggerated solemnity. Constant exposure to the sun had tanned his face a vigorous brown, but his moustache and eyebrows, which were of a size, appeared to have completely faded, and stood out, glow-worm-like, against the background of tan.

For a full minute they gazed at each other, the girl with parted lips and heightened color, the new-comer's gravity slowly giving way to the

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

good-humored persistence of his light-blue eyes, until with a smile he ran his fingers through his rumpled hair.

“Phew!” he said.

With something between a sob and an exclamation of delight, she clapped her hands together twice. “*Ciel!*” she cried, “but I am so happy!”

The mill-stream had ceased to shudder and had resumed its song. . . . With an air of furtive preoccupation, Louis emerged from concealment and proceeded towards them after the manner of an unpopular Mexican President walking down the main street of an unfriendly city. . . . The darkening shadows blended with the early approach of night. . . . And her heart was beating wildly, joyously.

Adventure had come to the lonely mill-house in Picardy—and, after all, one is not always sixteen.

## II

“Will you please tell me where I am?” The young man spoke in French with ease, but more than a trace of an English accent.



## THE AIRY PRINCE

"This is my uncle's mill."

"Of course. And that road?——"

"But the village road, monsieur—what else?"

"And, Mademoiselle Elusive, what village may it be?"

"'Tis where the church is, monsieur; and every Sunday I go there to mass."

The pilot produced a pipe and, extracting a pouch, proceeded to fill it with tobacco.

"I am lost," he said complacently. "My compass was shot away, and the clouds are hanging too low for me to follow any landmarks."

He looked about at the steadily thickening twilight. "How far is it to the village?" he asked.

"Five kilometers—and a little better."

"The Devil!" He made a screen from the wind with the flap of his coat, and lighting his pipe, puffed it with evident satisfaction. "I shall have to leave the old 'bus' here. As a matter of fact, she's so nearly 'napoo' that I rather expected to come riding home on one plane, like the old woman with the broom. But, mademoiselle——"

"Monsieur?"

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"I am very tired and distinctly hungry, and I know of a mill-house with a cosy fire in the kitchen, where a pretty little fairy that——"

"There is no fairy—only Louis."

"And who the deuce may he be?"

"The cat—*le voici!*"

He surveyed the feline with an air of tolerant gravity. "Do you think Louis may object if I remain for supper?"

"Ah—but no!" She laughed gaily, but a look of doubt changed the expression of her features in a moment. "But my uncle—he never has any one in the house. For many years I have lived alone with him. Only when the curé comes, perhaps once a month, does any one visit the mill. My uncle is very surly, a perfect bear, and often he gets drunk as well."

The young man raised his absurdly light eyebrows. "A pleasant relative, mademoiselle. And, pray, what is his grievance against his fellowmen?"

"I know not, monsieur. All week he works alone, except when he takes the flour to sell, but on Sundays he always goes to church and leads the chanting. He was taught Latin by his

## THE AIRY PRINCE

father, who was a gravedigger in Paris and learned it from the tombstones. So on Sundays my uncle, from his seat in the chancel, performs the chants in such a terrible voice that almost always some children scream with terror, and once Madame La Comtesse fainted."

The aviator relit his pipe, which had gone out, but did not remove his eyes from hers.

"Once," went on the girl, plucking a blade of grass and making a knot with it about her finger, "two villagers, Simon Barit and Armand Cartier, were requested by the curé, who is very small and weak, to tell my uncle to sing no more. Ah monsieur, it was terrible!"

"Yes?"

"My uncle he is a very strong man; he threw Simon Barit into the stream, and the other he chased almost to the village."

"And so, like the mill-stream, he goes on forever?"

"Ah, yes, monsieur, like the war—forever. Listen!"

A great voice, sonorous as that of the fabled giant calling for his evening meal of an Englishman, rent the air. The October wind seemed to



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

quiver to its lowest note, and the water racing over the chute was quieter than it had been for hours.

"I must go, monsieur. It is his supper he wants."

"And may I not come too?"

"Ah—but no! I am frightened."

"Of me?"

She raised her wide brown eyes to his, and her eyelashes, which so jealously guarded those guileless depths, parted grudgingly, revealing to him their full beauty. . . . Another roar shattered the air, and she laid her hand upon his wrist. "You must not come," she said earnestly. "He would throw you into the stream."

His melancholy face gave way to a boyish grin. "If he did, mademoiselle, my ghost would haunt him forever. All night it would sing outside his window—and, in truth, my singing is no less terrible than his."

There was another roar, followed by a reference to the untimely decease of ten thousand devils.

Without a word, she reached for her book, and, throwing her shawl over her left shoulder, hurried

## THE AIRY PRINCE

away. The aviator watched her girlish figure with its unconscious grace, then, turning about, he strolled to the machine, and, sitting on the side of the fuselage, surveyed its bullet-punctured carcass.

“Five kilometers and a little better,” he soliloquized in English, “and a doubtful prospect of a meal. . . . Contrast that with what the gods offer here—a cosy fire, coffee, eggs and chips, I warrant, and the daintiest of little maids—to say nothing of a musical uncle with an amiable propensity for throwing visitors into the stream. By Jove, it is chilly. . . . Over in dear old England they’ll be roasting nuts and telling ghost-stories to-night.”

The fast-thickening shadows deepened into the blackness of an October night; the wind grew quieter, but there was a bite in the air that made him draw his fur collar about his ears.

“What excellent French the little lady uses,” he went on. “I wonder who her parents were, and why the deuce she has to live with this ogre. And what eyes! Enough to make one invent new songs of Araby just to see them sparkle and soften. . . . One moment sad, another tender—

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and always lovely. Steady, the Air Force—you're becoming sentimental."

He looked at the battered machine and shook his head; a solitary raindrop lit on his face and slid down its surface like a tear.

A belated gust of wind smote his face and left it moist. He rose in a determined manner and adjusted his helmet.

"*Adieu*, my Camel!" He took a last survey of the machine. "The kitchen is calling to my appetite; a storm is brewing in the heavens; a pair of dark eyes is urging all the romance within me; so—mill-stream or no mill-stream—*mon oncle*, I come."

He squared his shoulders and, with the rather absurd long stride and the odd raising of the knee, made for the cottage door, from underneath which a faint glow of light was timidly emerging.

### III

In response to his knock there was a roar from within, and the door opened enough to show the young lady in the doorway.



## THE AIRY PRINCE

“Good evening,” he said gravely. “I saw the light in here and decided to accept its kindly invitation.”

She glanced over her shoulder; but the airman, gently putting her to one side, entered and looked serenely about the room, which appeared to be kitchen, dining-room, and parlor in one. Beside the stove he noticed the stooped figure of a man, whose huge black beard straggled over a suit of overalls that had once been dark blue, but had become a dirty white from constant association with flour.

“Good evening, monsieur.” The airman handed his helmet to the girl and proceeded to unbutton his coat. The miller’s blotched eyes rose sulkily to the visitor’s face.

“What do you want here?” His voice was nasal and slovenly, and there was a hoarse growl in the words, as though his throat was parched and rusted.

“I am doing myself the honor of taking supper with you, monsieur.” The airman’s face was full of melancholy dignity as he divested himself of his coat.

The miller’s mouth opened, and a rasping,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

deep snarl resonated disagreeably. "There is the village, five kilometers that way."

"Ah—but that is five kilometers too far."

"You cannot stay here"—the miller's voice rose angrily—"there is but food for two."

The Englishman tapped his pipe against his heel, and blew through it to ensure its being empty. "Then, monsieur," he said, "you must go hungry."

The Frenchman rose to his feet and brandished both arms above his head. "Go!" he bellowed, and swore an oath that comprised a reference to the sacred name of one dog and the sudden demise of the afore-mentioned ten thousand devils who, it appeared, rested heavily on his conscience.

"Mademoiselle" — the young man turned politely to the girl—"I apologize for this gentleman. Shall I throw him into the stream, or would a cleansing spoil his particular style of mottled beauty?"

The miller became eloquent. His language was threatening, blasphemous, and deafening. His whole ungainly body vibrated with a fury which, at certain moments, grew to such a pitch

## THE AIRY PRINCE

that he would raise his chin upwards until all that could be seen was a forest of beard, the while he emitted an unearthly roar that could have been clearly heard on the village road. The girl, who had been making preparations for supper, glanced timidly at him, but continued her work. The cat, slumbering by the stove, opened his eyes dreamily as if some sweet strain had come to his ears then settled to slumber once more.

And the whole room resounded and quivered to the hurricane of sound.

With an air of complete imperturbability, the intruding guest slowly backed towards the table and became engrossed in the task of refilling his pipe, though beneath the glow-worm eyebrows his eyes (which were very clear and blue, as though his excursions into the last free element of nature had blown all the dust and grime away) held the orator in a steady look.

"Fill your pipe?" he said cryptically, choosing a moment when his host was swelling up with a breath that promised to burst his ribs.

The response was startling.

Exhausting the air from his lungs with the noise of steam escaping from an overcharged



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

boiler, the miller rushed blindly forward, crouching so low that his beard against his discolored clothes suggested an ugly bush against a background of slushy snow.

With the precision of a guardsman forming fours, the airman took one pace to the rear with his left foot and one to the right with his right foot. This maneuver, successfully completed, placed the table between himself and his assailant, and, tilting it dexterously, he swiftly thrust that article of furniture forward, where it came into violent contact with the irate miller's knees and shins. With an indescribable howl the worthy man fell back in a paroxysm of agony, grasping his knees with both hands, and rocking to and fro like a demented dervish.

The airman bowed gravely to the girl. "I learned that," he said, "from a gentleman by name of Charlie Chaplin. If you can oblige me with a custard pie I shall hurl it at your uncle and thus complete the Chaplinesque method of discounting violence."

The young woman's brows puckered. The spectacle of her uncle's discomfiture had not disturbed her so much as this new kind of a person

## THE AIRY PRINCE

who could bow so courteously, whose eyes twinkled humorously, and whose words were full of gravity on the subject of custard pies. She came of a race that coördinated gestures and the play of features with speech; but this stranger of the air—*Sapristi!*

The moaning of the uncle grew less and his figure stopped its rocking; but his red, blotchy eyes looked furtively at the young man, biding their owner's time for a renewal of hostilities.

With an air of deep dejection the airman gazed at the unlovely spectacle, then, very slowly, unfastened his holster and drew a revolver.

"Monsieur," he said, "I offer peace. The alternative is—that I fill you full of holes—which would interfere with your singing. I intend to have supper here, because I saw hens outside. If they have given no eggs, we shall eat the hens themselves as a punishment. We are allies, you and I; let us be friends as well. Monsieur"—he struck a Napoleonic attitude—"Vive l'Entente!"

The swarthy face of the miller, who had retained his posture on the floor throughout, wrinkled hideously into a grin, which developed

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

into a roaring laugh that set a solitary vase jingling.

With a doubtful air of appreciation, the airman surveyed him, his head inclining dubiously to one side. "Come, monsieur," he said, after the miller's unpleasant mirth had subsided, "you sit there—at the far end of the table; made-moiselle—when you have given us the supper things—here; and I, at this end. Just to show how completely I trust you, my host, I will keep my revolver beside my plate; and should it be necessary for me to blow your brains out during the meal, it will be with the very keenest regret that I lose a friend for whom I have acquired such an instantaneous and profound affection."

Thus the young lady with the guileless eyes, the youth who had descended from the clouds, and the stentorian miller with the painful knees, sat down together for their evening repast.

And the mill-stream, chuckling as it sportively tumbled over the chute, made a pleasant serenade.



## THE AIRY PRINCE

### IV

The airman glanced at his wrist-watch; it was half-past nine. The miller slept by the side of the stove, his chin crushing his beard against his chest. Louis also slept, having curled himself into a black, fury ball, apparently possessed of neither head nor tail. A clock brazenly stating the time to be five-thirty, ticked lazily as though finding itself four hours behind the correct hour, there was no chance of its ever catching up, and it only kept going because it was the sporting thing to do. Just over the clock a picture of Marshal Joffre gazed paternally on the quiet scene.

Seated at the table, which was covered by a geranium-colored cloth, the girl and the airman sat silent, while a shaded lamp lent a crimson glow through which her deep eyes gleamed, like the first stars of a summer evening.

To her romance had come.

She was no longer the miller's niece, but the girl who had seen the Fairy Prince. All the sighs, all the questionings, all the longings of her girlhood had culminated in this amazing ad-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

venture of a fair-haired knight who, descending from the clouds, had proceeded to terrorize her uncle who was feared for miles around. It was wonderful. And he was so droll, this young man; and his voice had a little soothing drop in it, at times, that left a fluttering echo in her heart.

She had left the convent when ten years of age, on the death of her mother. Her father—but then gossip was never kind. He was an officer who had deserted his pretty little wife for another woman—or so rumor had it; and her mother had died, a flower stricken by a frost. The daughter had been taken by a relative, the owner of a lonely mill, and for six years had lived in solitude, her horizon of life limited to the adjacent village, her knowledge of women gained from the memory of a sad, yearning face, paler than the pillow on which it rested, and an occasional visit to the curé's sister. Of men she knew only her uncle and the few villagers that had not gone to fight for La Belle France.

From unquestioning childhood she had passed to that stage in a girl's life when the emotions leap past the brain, fretful of the latter's plodding pace. Her mind untutored, unsharpened

## THE AIRY PRINCE

by contact with other minds, left her the language and the reasonings of a child; but her imagination, feeding on the strange longings and dreams which permeated her life, pictured its own world where romance held sway over all the creatures that inhabited its realm.

It is the instinct of a little child to picture unreal things—the unconscious protest of immaturity against the commonplaceness of life. But with the education of to-day and the labyrinth of artificiality which characterizes modern living, the imaginativeness of childhood disappears, except in a few great minds who, retaining it, are hailed by the world as possessors of genius.

Unhampered (or unhelped, as the case may be) by association with the patchwork pattern of society, the miller's niece had retained her gift of imagination, without which the solitude and the monotony of her days would have been unendurable; until, blending it with the budding flower of womanhood, she found mystery in the moaning of the wind. While the sun danced upon the grass her spirit mingled with the sunlight; and when the moon exercised her suzerainty of the heavens the poetry in her soul



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

thrilled to sweet dreams of lover's wooings (though her unreasoned rapture often ended in unreasoned tears upon the pillow). . . . She found melancholy in the coloring of an autumn leaf, and laughter in the music of the mill-stream. . . . There were smugglers' tales in a northeast gale, and fairy stories in a summer's shower.

The doctrine of pleasure so feverishly followed by her sisters to-day was unknown to her—as was its insidious reaction which comes to so many women, with the dulling of the perceptions, the blinding of eyes to the colors of life, the deadening of ears to the music of nature, until they cannot hear the subtle melody of happiness itself, so closely allied to the somber beauty of sorrow.

“Little one”—the aviator's voice was very soft, so that the ticking of the clock sounded clearly above it—“in a few minutes I must go. It is a dark night, and of necessity I must get to the village to-night, and be on my way before dawn.”

Her eyes were hidden by her drooping eyelashes. “You will return—yes?” she asked, without looking up.

He smiled rather wistfully. “‘When the red-

## THE AIRY PRINCE

breasted robins are nesting,' " he quoted slowly, " 'I shall come.' "

The clock ticked wearily on. . . . A few drops of rain fell upon the roof.

"Monsieur"—the crimson in her cheeks deepened—"you must not smile; but it is in my book, here."

She took from the table *The Fairy Prince*, and handed it to him. He gazed at it with a seriousness he might have shown towards a book of Scottish theology.

"You know, monsieur"—she appeared deeply concerned in the design of the geranium table-cover—"I never leave the mill-house unless to attend mass, and sometimes—perhaps you would think so, too—it is very lonesome; no brother, no sister, just Louis and my uncle."

He nodded, and, with an air of abstraction, his brow wrinkled sympathetically, and his fingers strummed five-finger exercises on the table.

"It must be very dull," he said.

"But no, monsieur"—her eyes looked up in protest—"not dull—just lonesome."

He sustained an imaginary note with his little finger, frowned thoughtfully until his eye-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

brows almost obscured his eyes, then came down the scale with slow and measured pace.

“Well, little lady who is never dull, and what has all this to do with *The Fairy Prince*?”

“It is because I have no sisters, no friends, that—that I pretend. But you do not understand.”

He played some chord with both hands.

“Very young people and very old ones pretend,” he said, with dreamy sententiousness; “pretending is what makes them happy. But the Prince——?”

She smiled deprecatingly. “When I read, monsieur, I think that the girl—there is always a girl, is there not?” He nodded gravely. “I do not think it is she,” she went on, “but myself; and when the book is finished, and she marries her lover, then I am happy . . . and dream . . .”

“‘We are such stuff as dreams are made of,’” he murmured, and trilled with his first and second fingers.

“So, monsieur,” she continued, glancing shyly at him, “in that book——”

“There is a girl.”



## THE AIRY PRINCE

“Yes. And a Fairy Prince who was very handsome.”

“Like me?”

“It does not say, monsieur.”

“Ah!”

“But I think so,” she said earnestly, “for he was the handsomest man in all France.”

“It said nothing of England?”

“No, monsieur, only France.”

He nodded with great dignity, and motioned her to proceed. She leaned forward with her elbows on the table, and rested her chin on her interlocked fingers.

“To-day I was reading it to Louis,” she said, “when, just at the moment that they met—*vous voilà!*—you came. Monsieur,” she said naïvely, “are you a fairy prince?”

He considered, with head characteristically on one side.

“N-no,” he said, “I cannot claim that, but——”

“Ah, yes?” Her face lit up with delighted anticipation.

“I am a prince of the air.” He struck an attitude and held it.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"Oh!" Her lips parted in ecstasy and her cheeks, which had been crimson, became scarlet. "You—are really a prince?"

"Of the air, mademoiselle." He folded his arms and tilted his chair back. His face was still grave, but his voice had a sense of distance in it, and his light eyes widened as though they saw the world his words were picturing. "My kingdom is greater than all the kingdoms of the earth, and when I ride, my steed with wings takes me towards the stars. For sport I play with clouds and race the wind; at night the moon gives me light; and when I travel there are no mountains to climb, no lakes to cross. I go faster than the swiftest horse, and ride from villages to cities, out into the country, and over the sea with a steed that never tires."

"But, monsieur," she cried, "this is wonderful!"

He looked frankly into her eyes. "It is wonderful," he said.

For a few minutes neither spoke, and the soft symphony of raindrops played through the quietness of the night.

"Your Majesty," she said timorously, "are you

## THE AIRY PRINCE

very brave? You understand," she hurried on as a slight blush darkened the tan of his cheeks, "in fairy books the prince always fights a dragon or a wicked giant."

"Don't uncles count?"

She made a pretty *moue*.

"As a matter of fact," he said slowly, "there was a wicked Emperor—a blustering popinjay with a madman's vanity—who decreed that all the world should be his slaves, and sent his armies into France and Belgium to enforce his will. My brothers heard of this, and came from countries and dominions thousands of miles away. Across great continents of water they sailed, and, with their brothers from the little Islands of the North Sea, came to France . . ."

"Your voice is very sad," she said tenderly. Her nature, that knew every mood of a summer breeze, had caught the inflection of his words, understanding by their tone what the vagueness of his words hid from her mind.

"So many have died," he said, looking away from her. "Almost every day some one rides out into the sunlight to his death, young, brave, and



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

smiling. . . . Mademoiselle, it is wonderful how they smile."

Tick—tick—tick.

For more than a minute neither spoke, then, with a smile that was strangely boyish, he squared his shoulders and ran his fingers through his rumpled hair.

"Ha!" he laughed; "what fancies get into a scatter-brain like mine when the rain's a-pattering on the roof. If you will allow me, little Pippa, I shall smoke."

"Little Peepa?" she laughed delightedly.

"Pippa," he assented, puffing smoke as he lighted the pipe. "I think I shall call you that. You see, according to her biographer, Mr. Browning, she worked in the silk-mills all the year, but one day she had to herself, from dawn to midnight, and so as to enjoy it to the full she—well, she pretended, like you."

"But that is droll," she said eagerly, "for every Easter after Sunday, my uncle, who is fatigued from so much chanting in the church, always goes to Boulogne and becomes drunk for one whole day. On Wednesday he returns. These six years he has done it always the same; and on

the Tuesday it is wonderful. I am alone with Louis, and we ask all the people in our books to visit us."

A sudden gleam of excitement lit his eyes.

"The Tuesday after Easter?"

"Always it is so."

"Pippa," he said—but checked the remainder of his words. He placed the pipe in his mouth and ran five-finger exercises at a terrific speed.

"Pippa," he said again, then, ceasing his display of virtuosity, leaned back and gazed at her from beneath his eyebrows. "Next spring, on the Tuesday after Easter, I will come for you."

She caught her breath deliriously.

"Beyond the village road," he went on, speaking slowly and distinctly, "I saw a big pasture-field at the top of the hill. Be there as the sun is just above the horizon, and I will come in an aeroplane."

"And, your Majesty, you will take me to your kingdom?"

"For one day, Pippa, to the great city of London—the city that is open to all who possess a golden key. We shall return by the stars at night."

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Then”—her voice shook, and the brilliancy of her eyes was softened by sudden tears, as the rays of an August sun are sometimes tempered by a shower, “then—at last—I am to see the world—boys and girls and palaces and——”

“To say nothing of prunes and potentates.”

“Oh, but, your Majesty, it is too wonderful. I am certain it will not come true.”

He rose and quietly placed his chair against the wall. “Pippa,” he said, “there are only two things that could prevent it. One, if there is a storm and—the other——” he shook his head impatiently.

The girl took down a work-basket, and after searching its contents extracted a tiny trinket.

“You mean,” she said, stepping lightly over to him, “that you might go to join your brothers—those who smiled so bravely?”

“We never know, Pippa,” he answered.

She reached for the lapel of his coat and pinned the little keepsake on it. “’Tis a black cat,” she said. “I saw it in the village store, so small and funny, like Louis. It is a gift from little Pippa, who will pray to the Virgin every



## THE AIRY PRINCE

night that her Prince may not be killed—unless——”

He looked at the little mascot, which dangled above a couple of ribbons.

“Unless?” he said.

For a moment there was a flash in her eyes and a sudden crimson flush in her cheeks that startled him. For the first time in her life she felt the instinct of a tigress; that strange fusion of passion and timidity that comes to women of her kind when it seems they may lose the object of their love.

“Unless he—forgets.” The words were spoken between lips that hardly moved.

“By the sacred bones of my ancestors,” he said, with a sort of sincere grandiloquence, “I promise to come. So that I shall always think of you, my Pippa, I will paint a black cat upon the machine, and woe to the Hun who dares to singe its whiskers!”

A few minutes later, the heavily coated figure of an aviator was plowing its way through a drizzling rain, along a dark and solitary road. His pace was extraordinarily long for his height,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

and he appeared to be stepping over a perpetual array of obstacles at least one foot high.

By a casement window a girl, with hair like the dusk, stood gazing towards the road that was hidden in darkness. Silently and motionless she watched the melancholy drops of rain as they fell upon the glass, until, unconsciously, her lips parted and she sang, very softly, the little song taught to the maiden in the story by the lonely shepherd:

“Maman, dites moi ce qu'on sent quand on aime.  
Est-ce plaisir, est-ce tourment?”

She paused in the improvised melody, and repeated the words slowly.

“Est-ce plaisir, est-ce tourment?”

And then the little mistress of the mill laid herself upon her bed and wept profusely; but whether it was because she was happy or because she was sorrowful, let those explain who understand the psychology of a woman's tears.

Downstairs, Louis and the miller slept profoundly.

## THE AIRY PRINCE

### V

It was several months later that an airman emerged from his hut into the chilly air of an April night that was lingering grudgingly over its last hour of darkness. There was a sullen rumble of guns borne on a restless breeze that stirred the long grass of the fields and set the leaves in the trees whispering and quivering. The drone could be heard of a lonely aeroplane returning from its night-ride over the enemy lines. . . . Above the distant roll of the artillery, one gun stood out like a pizzicato note on a giant bass violin.

The airman passed the silent aerodrome, and, with difficulty accustoming himself to the darkness, made out the shadow of a machine in the adjoining field. He heard the sigh of cylinders sucking in the petrol as the mechanics warmed the machine, and walked over to it. For a moment he spoke to the men before climbing into the pilot's seat. There followed the incisive monotone of the flier's incantation between himself and the non-commissioned officer.



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"Petrol on: switch off."

"Petrol on: switch off."

"Contact."

"Contact."

The propellers were swung into action, hesitated for a moment, then wheezily subsided.

The incantation was repeated; the propeller blades coughed, and leaped into a deafening roar. The mechanics sprang aside, and the machine, stumbling forward for a few yards, turned into the wind. There was a sudden acceleration of the propeller, a crescendo from the engines, and the machine made swiftly across the field, rising as it attained flying speed, and disappearing into the night.

A few moments later its light was mixing with the dulling stars, and the drone of its engine could be heard only at the whim of the breeze.

"I wonder what the Black Cat's up to now," said mechanic No. 1, rubbing his hands together for warmth. "Rum beggar, isn't he?"

His companion slapped his breast with his arms and blew on his fingers. "Mad as a March hare," he growled; "takes a two-seater out at this time of night."

## THE AIRY PRINCE

"And did you notice the extra outfit?"

"He's mad," repeated the before-dawn psychologist, "mad as a rabbit."

"But he's a mighty stout boy," interposed the N.C.O., who was torn between his duty of keeping discipline and his love of character study; "and he sure puts the wind up Fritz when he takes off with his Black Cat Bristol fighter."

The blackness of night was beginning to give way to a dull and sullen gray as the solitary pilot made a detour over the lines. In the gloom beneath he could see a long crescent of orange-colored flashes where the British guns were maintaining their endless pounding of the enemy. Farther east was a large patch of winking, yellow lights, giving to his eye the same effect as flakes of gunpowder dropped upon a heated stove: it was the bursting of the British shells. Beyond that field of death he could see other and larger flashes, and knew the Hun was replying in kind.

Everywhere the darkness was being penetrated by long, rocket-like lights with a white, starry burst at the end, and, as though to give variety to the scene, a few red and green bursts mingled garishly with them.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

To the airman, from his refuge of height, it all combined in an uncanny pageant of fireworks—a weird spectacle of death, as though hell had opened and the passions of men were feeding the flames to make a devils' holiday.

A searchlight woke him from his reverie. A couple of anti-aircraft guns barked at him. With a smile he noticed the rapid approach of morning's light, and, turning to the west, he set his course by the compass and made for the lonely mill-house of Picardy.

## VI

From a meadow at the top of a hill, a girl watched the horizon of the east as the first glow of daylight heralded the arrival of Aurora's chariot. The hurried walk from the mill-house and the climbing of the hill had set her pulses throbbing with vitality, and as she watched the dull gray give way with the promise of dawn, a wild, unthinking spirit of exaltation seized her. Like the Pippa of Browning's song, she felt her spirit rise with the triumph of nature.



## THE AIRY PRINCE

Day!

Faster and more fast,

O'er night's brim, day boils at last:

Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim

Where spurting and suppressed it lay,

For not a froth-flake touched the rim

Of yonder gap in the solid gray

Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;

But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,

Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,

Rose, reddened, and its seething breast

Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.

But he had not come—her Prince with the solemn face and the laughing eyes. Day after day, through the long winter, she had lived for this hour, thrilling over it, picturing it, dreaming of it—both awake and asleep. . . . And he had not come.

Suppose—supposing——

Her heart leaped painfully. She had heard a sound like the humming of an insect—faint—then more clear. The hum became a drone, and in sheer intoxication she reached her hands towards the east as the sun, well above the horizon,

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

illumed the sky with gold-red flames. Blinded by its brilliancy, she turned away; but her ear heard the cessation of the engine as the pilot brought his machine towards the earth. She knew that he must be approaching her; yet she kept her face averted, on some caprice of sixteen years, until she heard his voice calling, a few yards off.

He bowed very low as, with lowered eyes, she gave him her hand; then, indicating a coat on his arm, he leant towards her, with some effort making his voice heard above the impatient throbbing of the aeroplane's engine.

"Take off your hat," he cried, noticing with quick approval the pretty costume she wore (for however poor she may be, no French girl is without one becoming frock), "and slip your curls into this helmet. It's the largest I could find."

She did as she was bidden, laughing delightedly.

"Now, youngster, climb into this."

He wrapped her in a fur-lined leather coat, and after buttoning it securely, lingered for a moment over the amusing and dainty picture she presented. Then, picking her up in his arms, he carried her over to the machine and deposited her

## THE AIRY PRINCE

in the observer's seat, fastening the belt. He was just about to climb into his place in front, when, changing his mind, he leaned over to her and placed both hands on her shoulders.

"Frightened?" he smiled, speaking so close to her ear that a truant curl brushed against his cheek.

She shook her head decisively—for a considerable period she had been beyond the power of speech.

He looked into her eyes, which seemed to have borrowed something of the sunlight, and patted her reassuringly on the shoulder. . . . And Mademoiselle Pippa, niece of the absent miller, would have gone straight to the moon with him had it been his wish and in his power.

She watched him wonderingly as he lifted a heavy sand-bag used as ballast, and dropped it on the ground. The next moment he was in the pilot's seat, there was a crescendo of the engine, a waddling sensation as the aeroplane went forward, the sudden development of the crescendo, the burst of speed, and . . .

The earth was receding!

She caught her breath, and hid her face in her



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

hands to stifle a cry and keep the sight from her eyes. She had been afraid that she would faint with dizziness, and for a full minute sat, terror-stricken, until, gaining courage, she tremblingly parted two fingers and cast a timorous glance below. A cry escaped from her—but it was not one of fear.

Beneath her, though she was not conscious of height, the countryside spread, a great masterpiece of color, the light brown of plowed fields standing out vividly against the green of meadows where sheep (she laughed out at the thought) were huddled in little groups like peanuts; roads had become paths, and cottages were dwarfed to miniature dwellings for the tiniest dolls.

But—she felt no height.

Only, the landscape, refreshed after its long winter repose, kept closing in—closing in, displaying new beauties every minute, as though she were in real truth a Fairy Princess summoning villages and rivers and farms into one vast tapestry of nature.

And this was France! As far as the eye could see, it was France, the mother of greatness. For the first time she pictured the wide, charred plains

## THE AIRY PRINCE

where the Hun had been, and scalding tears hid everything from her sight.

Several times her cavalier of the clouds had turned around to see that she was not frightened, and, as often as he did so, she nodded excitedly, and waved both hands after the manner of an orchestral conductor calling for a fortissimo. Once he shut off the engines, and they seemed to lie in the wind, a becalmed ship of the air.

“All right?” he queried inelegantly.

She tried to think of some word to summarize her emotions, but, failing utterly, raised her goggles and thanked him with her eyes. A woman’s methods are not affected by altitude.

It seemed to her that they had flown for an hour, when, in her tapestry of landscape, she found the gradual inclusion of the steeples and the roof-tops of a city, the streets of which gave the impression of having been drawn with a brown crayon with the aid of a ruler. The aeroplane appeared to be turning with the wind, and she grasped the side of the fuselage, when the whole scene was obliterated by a sea of billowy foam that left her cheek wet. She laughed with delight, and reached out with her hands, as though

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

she would grasp the foam and compress it like snow in her fingers. She sang and clapped her hands in sheer joyousness. She was alone with her Prince in a world of dreams. The billows of foam grew less dense, became a mist through which light gleamed, and they emerged once more. Beneath them lay the Channel, shimmering in the April sun. The magic wand drew the Strait to her gaze as it had done the fields of France. . . . Suddenly there was no throbbing of the engine, and they seemed to float, motionless, in space.

He turned around and pointed to a border of white that lay against the blue of the water.

*"Enfin!"* he cried. "England!"

## VII

There was a knock at the door of "The Plough and Crown," which, in spite of its similarity to the title of a treatise, is the name of an exceedingly cosy little inn less than twenty miles from the outskirts of London. The landlady answered in person, presenting just the stout, apple-cheeked,



## THE AIRY PRINCE

buxom appearance that any one would expect from the owner of so cheery a hostelry.

“Good-morning to you, sir—and to you, miss,” said the estimable woman, as the unlocked door revealed an airman of solemn mien and a blushing young lady whose hair had been blown into utter and captivating disorder.

A very small dog appeared, irritably, from some subterranean passage, and taking in the sight of strangers, proceeded to bark with such energy that, with each effort, he was shunted several inches to the rear, like a gun recoiling after discharge, until from very ill-temper he barked himself completely off the scene and out of this history.

“Good-morning, madam,” said the aviator. “This young lady and myself would like to have breakfast at your house.”

The girl glanced furtively at him. It was the first time she had heard him speak in English.

“Bless your baby faces!” cried the good woman. “Come in out of the chilly morning; though what you be doing at this hour is beyond the likes o’ me to fathomate” (a word which per-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

formed its function by being thoroughly understood).

She led them into the coffee-room, where he removed his coat and helmet, and threw them, together with the girl's flying-costume, over a chair. A sleepy-eyed and slovenly young woman-of-all-work appeared on the scene, and proceeded to build a wood fire in the grate; while the landlady, after the manner of her kind, bustled about, shifting chairs, colliding with the fire-making girl, removing glasses from the bar to the table, from the table to the shelf, and back again to the bar again, all the while talking incessantly, or making comfortable noises when words failed her (which was very seldom), and in short, giving that feeling of hospitable activity handed down from the good old days when passengers used to arrive by coach at "The Plough and Crown."

"Madam," said the flying-man, seizing a moment when a more than usually severe jolt against her assistant had deprived the good woman of breath, "I must telephone the aerodrome at Hounslow to send for my machine, so I shall stroll to the post-office down the road. In the

## THE AIRY PRINCE

meantime—this young lady speaks no English——”

“Bless her heart! What heathen country——”

“—— speaks no English,” he persisted, “and has traveled a long distance in the air——”

“Well, I’ve often said that——”

“—— in the air,” he repeated, stifling her philosophy in its birth, “and I shall be grateful if you will give her any attentions that your kind heart may suggest. She is cold, and I suppose she wants to make herself look pretty.”

“Leave her to me, the sweet innocent. If she were my own daughter, me not having any, but——”

“When I return, may we have breakfast?”

“A simple breakfast ’twill have to be,” said the hostess, emitting the words with a forcefulness reminiscent of a geyser that has been supporting on its chest a mountain which has obligingly shifted its position. “Things is awful bad, and the Government don’t trust no one these days. But I’ll see what I can get for you two children, for you’re an officer gentleman, and my own good man’s in the army—London Scottish he is, though he ain’t any more Scottish than the Pope



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

of Rome; but he always had a fine figure, had my man—Jacob Wilson is his name, for thirty year owner of “The Plough and Crown,” which always is welcome to them as wants a pint o’ bitter or a bed for the night, and always will be as long as Jacob Wilson or me is to be found in the taproom when opening-time arrives.”

After this announcement of the past and future policy of “The Plough and Crown,” the worthy woman seized a chair that was innocently gazing out of the window, and placed it directly opposite a highly colored picture of a young lady in pink, talking to a blue young gentleman, while a yellow horse, in proportion a little larger than the horse of Troy, looked soulfully at them over a hedge.

Having done this, she rested her hands on her hips and sighed like a woman who knows she is overworked, but is resigned to her fate.

“Excuse me,” said the airman politely, then turned to his companion, who had been staring in wide-eyed bewilderment at the activities of Mrs. Jacob Wilson. . . . Frowning heavily at his young passenger, he inserted his pipe into his mouth, and left the inn without another word,

## THE AIRY PRINCE

sauntering along the roadway, where hedges and meadow-larks and cosy thatched cottages were combining in the merriest of madrigals on the beauty of Old England.

Upstairs, in "The Plough and Crown," Pip-pa's toilet was being superintended by the estimable proprietress, whose hospitality, surmounting the difficulty of language, poured out in a stream of garrulity.

She described to her little guest how Mr. Jacob Wilson first appeared in kilts, causing her (Mrs. Jacob Wilson) to throw her apron over her face and bid her lord and master go upstairs and clothe himself in propriety. She further confessed that he was a poor correspondent (though a man of deep intellect, for he was given to long spasms of silence); but every time he wrote from the trenches, which was once a month (though one month he had written twice, but in September—or was it October?—he had not written at all)—at any rate, he always said that he had a cold in his head and would she send his medicine, which he had used for eight-and-twenty years, and which had never failed to cure him.

After this testimony to Mr. Jacob Wilson's

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

recuperative powers, despite his susceptibility to colds, his wife became confidential, and told the girl of the adoration showered on her during her honeymoon by the aforesaid absent gentleman, together with other and romantic details which, being told in the strictest confidence, naturally have no place in these pages.

And the little girl from the Picardy mill-house listened. She may have understood that somewhere in the landlady's bountiful breast a noble heart was beating, that behind her cheerfulness lay the shadow of the trenches, and that any moment "The Plough and Crown" might be robbed of the good man who had marched away with the London Scottish.

She may have understood less than that—or more. Who knows?

Half-an-hour later the Airy Prince returned, and they sat down together to a breakfast served to the tune of chortling fowls and the neighing of a nearby horse, while the fire chuckled and crackled in enjoyment of some joke of its own.

"Well, Pippa," said the Black Cat, seizing a moment when Mrs. Jacob Wilson had absented



## THE AIRY PRINCE

herself from the room, "and what do you think of the English?"

The girl of the mill-house pictured the only two she had met.

"I think," she said timidly, "that you are—how say you it—great talkers, yes?"

"Bless my soul!" said he, cutting a loaf of bread with the melancholy of an executioner beheading an esteemed relative; "aren't we?"

## VIII

The train for London came round the bend, and drew up, panting, beside the platform. The airman and his little companion glanced into four compartments which were completely filled, and, hearing the admonition of the guard, were forced to enter a first-class carriage containing five occupants, who glared at the intruders with that triumph of rudeness found only on an English railroad.

"Sorry," murmured the airman, and added something unintelligible about the train being full. A fierce-looking gentleman looked up from the *Morning Post* and lowered the window to its

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

fullest extent. An anemic woman opposite sneezed and fixed a devastating stare on the fierce gentleman. A very young officer of the Guards felt his lip, and stroked that portion of it which was pregnant with promise of mustache, while his mind wandered into the future. Would he cut Lady Dazzrymple's beastly dance, and content himself with only three that evening? Or, dash it all! should he go the whole works? What a bore! . . . A young woman with a face of deep intensity read the *New Statesman*, every now and then looking up from its pages (as a horse drinking at a trough will raise its head between draughts), apparently defying any one to challenge her on anything.

With his hands lazily in his coat-pockets, an Australian captain leant back in his corner and took in the freshness and winsomeness of the French girl, with an admiring frankness that inspired sudden doubt in the airman's mind whether it was really desirable to maintain a huge Empire.

For ten minutes, in a funereal silence, the train hurried towards the Metropolis, while the temperature of the compartment, both actually

## THE AIRY PRINCE

and temperamentally, dropped to freezing-point. Once, as an unusually pretty meadow met her eye (and where are there such meadows as one sees in England?), Pippa emitted an exclamation of delight and clapped her hands.

A look of horror from the fierce gentleman caromed off the *Morning Post* to the face of the offender. The anemic woman stopped blowing her nose, and concentrated all her energies on a disdainful sniff. The very young Guardsman brought his eyes out of the future, and stared right through the girl—rotten form, what! The intense young woman frowned and made a mental note that she would write an article on “The Girl of To-day”—or, perhaps, a letter to the *New Statesman* would be more effective. One never knew, these degenerate times, if an author was writing from conviction or merely writing for a living.

The Australian smiled generously, and burrowed his hands deeper into his capacious pockets.

Very timidly the erring daughter of France shifted closer to her protector, and her hand reached appealingly for his, which caused all eyes



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

but the Australian's to disappear like the legs of a troupe of Japanese acrobats from a cross-bar.

"Your Majesty——" she said.

"Hush, Pippa. You must call me just 'monsieur.' "

"But why?"

"Well—you see, a prince is very important, and——"

"Then that is why these people are so solemn? They know you are a prince, yes?"

The airman tapped the bridge of his nose meditatively. "N-not exactly," he said.

"But they are so sad."

"They are," he agreed; "but my countrymen sink to their greatest melancholy when they travel."

"But why, monsieur?"

"That," he said, "I cannot tell you. Perhaps traveling on a train reminds them of the brief journey of life itself. At any rate, all really well-bred people who travel resent others doing the same thing."

"What are well-bred people?"

He gazed at an advertisement for pyjamas.

"Well-bred people," he said sententiously,

## THE AIRY PRINCE

“are those who base their superiority on such intangible things that they leave nothing on which one can contest it. Do you understand me?”

“No,” said Pippa frankly; “but I like your voice.”

“Thank you, little one. It was one of the first things I learned at Harrow—to say something well rather than something worth hearing.”

“I wonder if Louis had his breakfast,” said she, at a tangent.

“I think so,” he said, with a man’s vagueness towards domestic economy; “but, to finish my definition of well-bred people——”

“Louis will be angry at my leaving him,” she said musingly.

“Pippa, you must listen to me,” he said gravely.

“But may I not talk as well?”

“Really charming women only listen.”

“*Tiens!* What a droll country! Do these people understand what we say?”

“I don’t think so, youngster. Most Britishers look on foreign languages as immoral.”

The fierce gentleman, who had been growing bluer with cold every minute, suddenly en-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

deavored to suppress a sneeze by smothering his face in a large handkerchief, with the result that he produced a combustive cohesion of sounds, which caused a gurgle of delight from the miller's niece. Violently blowing his nose, the irate one resumed his newspaper, first turning his coat-collar about his ears as the bracing April air blew full against him, and looking as genuinely bad-tempered as his somewhat immobile features would permit.

"But he is amusing, is he not?" cried the little French girl, then shrank back as the New Statesmanist fixed her with a look of ineffable and disapproving intellectuality. "Monsieur, why is it she looks at me so?"

The aviator transferred his scrutiny from pyjamas to a picture of Canterbury Cathedral.

"She is the New Woman," he said; "and all New Women resent the Old."

"I am old?—but no!"

He lowered his eyes from the cathedral to her happy, flushed face.

"Pippa," he said, "you are as old as Cleopatra."

"Cleo-patra. How many years has she?"



## THE AIRY PRINCE

“Oh, about two thousand.”

She pretended to be offended, and ended by looking such a thoroughly engaging little figure, with her dark hair and innocently intriguing eyes, that the airman resumed his study of architecture from sheer self-defense, and the Australian contemplated the odds against his knocking the student of cathedrals on the head, and, *à la* caveman of old, eloping forcibly with the damsel.

Chimney-pots! Hundreds of them—thousands of them.

Chimney-pots! Standing like regiments in stiff and orderly array, waiting for a review that never took place.

Chimney-pots! Short ones, stout ones, crumbling ones; gray, blue, and indigo ones; pots of no color at all, and just as little character.

Chimney-pots! Racing by, mile after mile; industrious fellows, some of them, puffing out black smoke as though the mist over London were their private and personal concern.

Chimney-pots!

“Waterloo!” yelled a dozen voices, and the bewildered Pippa heard a stamping of feet, a rat-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

tling of trucks, the din of two porters in a semi-religious discussion concerning the right of way, the din being aided and abetted by a young gentleman possessed of a voice which had recently broken, who howled, alternately in a deep bass and a shrill treble (giving the general effect of a Swiss yodeler running amok), that, in exchange for coin of the realm, he was willing to barter light refreshment—very light refreshment indeed—in the shape of small biscuits or popular magazines. A slim girl porter, far too weak for her task, dragged a trunk from the van for a vigorous indispensable, who stood by with sixpence in his hand. A sailor kissed a rosy-cheeked woman with moist heartiness. . . . A taxi-driver, outside the station, took a sudden and violent dislike to a horse-cabby, casting loud aspersions on the latter's respectability, and hinting at a doubtful pedigree; to which the other replied simultaneously, his remarks being quite unintelligible, but apparently giving himself the greatest personal satisfaction. Down the road a street-piano burst forth into "The Lost Chord."

"Pippa," said the airman, opening the door,

## THE AIRY PRINCE

"we have arrived. The Prince with the Golden Key welcomes you to London."

"*Mon Dieu*," said that young person, "what a noise!"

### IX

It was nearing the middle of the afternoon when the airman succeeded, after some difficulty, in piloting his little companion across Piccadilly Circus to Regent Street. It is something to be noticed in that most cosmopolitan of districts, but more than one turned to watch the solemn officer of the formidable stride and the French girl whose wealth of hair and length of dress (barely revealing her ankles) made her seem a vignette from some past century novel.

It had been, for her, a day of wonders.

From her lonely little world, peopled with make-believe inhabitants, she had been transported through the air to the center of reality. London, the "Bagdad of the West," huge, monotonous, garish, beautiful—what term is there in language that could not be applied to that great gathering of human souls?—London



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

sprawled before her gaze in a yellow sunlight which played such tricks with its tired buildings that age-old stone looked bright and cheerful, and the very dust seemed like the coating of frost when a thaw succeeds a freezing night.

Before her eyes the pageant of passions passed in endless array. Poverty and hypocrisy rubbed shoulders with ostentation, greed, and lust. Streets, crowded with a suffocating similarity of stodgy dwelling-places, gave way to parks, fragrant with the atmosphere of romance. Vice stalked unashamed through the thronged streets, and dull, tired faces, leaving monotony in their trail, passed their next of kin without a glance, those to whom discouragement had come as some incurable disease. Sinister, sensuous eyes looked into hers, and children pure in mind as snowflakes laughed as they walked beside their nurses.

For the sun was in the heavens—and the same warmth that brings the beauty of a narcissus into being gives life to the noisome, crawling things that feed on decay.

London's costume drama was at its height; uniformed men and girls paraded in their thousands. There were loose-limbed Colonials,

## THE AIRY PRINCE

slouchily-smart British Tommies, amazingly serious Americans; bus-girls, land-girls, girls on motor-cycles, and girls driving ambulances; graceful French officers, swarthy Italians, impassive Japanese, and ruddy-faced British sailors seeking a day's diversion from the sentry-go of the sea.

From the great, throbbing city a babel of voices rose, like the sound from a gigantic mart; hurrying, restless vehicles worried their way through the maze of traffic; Youth with its carelessness of years elbowed Age, waiting with weakening tread the call of the Reaper to whom all men's lives are but sands that run their little course. Over the whole city brooded the Past.

Take all the comedies of the centuries; gather the tragedies of history; piece them together with the fancies of a madman's brain—and what could they offer in the play of human emotions that would compare with one hour of London's life?

They had gone a little way down Regent Street when an exclamation of delight escaped from the girl.

"*Tiens!*" She caught the airman by the arm.  
"Papa Joffre!"

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

A one-legged man with outstretched cap was seated on the pavement, and beside him were five colored drawings vaguely suggesting men of the times.

"But he is wonderful," cried the girl. "See—it is Papa Joffre himself! Monsieur, you will give him a little present?"

The airman presented the art-exhibitor with half-a-crown, receiving a gin-and-watery blessing in return, as they strolled on their way.

"She's the fust one," muttered the cripple, preparing to close business for the day, "as 'as recognoized that there dial of Juff's this last four month. It were a rotten drawink and no mistike. Blime! I'll give that cove this 'arf-crown to draw me a picter of this 'ere General Fush as what is getting hisself talked abaht."

He saw a shadow on the pavement and held out his cap. A Jewish rabbi, with sallow brow and spiritual face, passed without a glance, his flowing robes oddly reminiscent of the Levite in that Past to which the age of London is mere immaturity.

The wanderers turned into Pall Mall, and, traversing it, reached the Strand, where the meet-



## THE AIRY PRINCE

ing of human currents forms a whirlpool. Threading their way with difficulty, he felt the restraining hand on his arm, as he had done two hundred times that day. The girl had stopped opposite a hollow-eyed old woman offering violets, from her seat on a box, to the thousands who cared as little for her flowers as for her.

Once more he produced the inevitable coin, and again received a blessing, as trembling, unlovely fingers clutched it. He was about to turn away, when something almost attractive in the wrinkled face held his attention. The woman had looked searchingly at the girl, then into his eyes, and, touched by sudden sympathy, there was a faded echo of comeliness in her features that came and went, like a glow caused by a breath of air on ashes that seemed dead.

“What is it, mother?” he asked, holding the girl’s arm. “Business bad?”

“Yes—yes,” answered the woman in a low, weak voice; “but it’s her I’m thinking of. Take care of her, laddie, won’t you?”

The girl, unable to understand them, leaned over and smiled into the wrinkled face. With a little air of embarrassment Pippa picked half-a-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

dozen violets from her cluster, holding them out to the woman, who took them with strangely twitching features, just as an encircling current of the Strand caught them in its grip and carried them away.

Although they had rested at noon in a quiet hostelry in Oxford Street, after visiting Kensington Gardens where the delightful statue of Peter Pan pleads for belief in fairies, it was obvious that the strain of countless impressions was beginning to bring fatigue to his charge. Accordingly the airman paused in the doorway of a theater and drew her away from the traffic's turmoil.

"It is three-thirty," he said, "and there is a performance inside."

Her eyes, which still held their tenderness for the woman of the flowers, sparkled happily.

"That is delightful monsieur. Is it a play as I read in my books?"

"Alas, Pippa! there are no more plays—only revues."

"But there is music?"

"There is an orchestra."

"It will be droll, monsieur?"

"I doubt it, little one; but we shall see."

## THE AIRY PRINCE

Purchasing tickets from a lordly being in a cage, they entered the theater, where a huge audience was rocking with laughter at the three hundred and sixteenth performance of *Oh Aunt!* They took their seats just in time to hear the best of a scene between two comedians who, lest the subtlety of their wit be lost, were talking at the top of their lung-power, pulling chairs from underneath one another, colliding frequently, and every now and then, to emphasize some point, kicking each other.

Several minutes passed, and wonderingly the French girl gazed at the pair, while the melancholy of her escort's face reached an intensity that threatened tears.

"Monsieur."

He inclined his face towards hers.

"Monsieur—they are——?" She did not complete the sentence, but her shoulders conveyed her meaning.

He smiled sadly. "They are," he said.

She sighed sympathetically. "Poor gentlemen!" she murmured.

After that the comedians sang a duet, the words of which dealt with marital infidelity, that



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

screamingly funny subject on which the stage of to-day builds its humorous efforts. Once the verse ended with an innuendo so crude that a gathering of navvies might have resented it.

There was a laugh and a gasp from the audience—then wild applause; the song could not go on for the riot of appreciation. One of the comedians (who had sung it only three hundred and fifteen times) tried to commence the next verse, but was suddenly overcome with laughter himself. The guffaws became a barrage; then, as the other singer turned abruptly about, his shoulders heaving convulsively, the din grew to drum-fire and was deafening. How richly humorous! It was really too much! People held their sides and gasped for breath.—“Have you seen *Oh Aunt?* My dear, it is *too* killing for words.”

Up in the gallery one man sat with an unsmiling face. He was a wounded Tommy who had been blown from a ditch to the top of a barn, and from the barn to another ditch. He had had his fill of slapstick comedy.

When the song was over there were shrieks of forced, girlish laughter, and nearly forty

## THE AIRY PRINCE

young women in various stages of dishabille rushed on the stage, exhibiting to a critical audience the charms and the defects of their forty individual forms. The producer had been both daring and sparing. He was a second-rate burlesque manager in New York, but London, that great haven for American mediocrity, recognized his genius, and gave him a chance. He knew the value of a chorus, and how to get the best out of them—oh, he knew!

“Monsieur.”

The officer turned slowly and looked at the girl beside him. Her face was flushed and her eyes stared at the ground.

“Yes, little one?”

“Please—take me away.”

Without questioning her further, he reached for his cap, and amid the wondering glances of the people around, they left the theater. He paused in the foyer and put on his gloves.

“I am sorry, Pippa,” he said gravely.

Her hand stole soothingly into his arm, and both of them, unknown to each other, experienced a feeling that he was the younger of the two. After all, every woman is a potential

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

mother, and men are only boys grown serious; so she comforted him with the touch of her hand, and—perhaps it was the natural contraction in putting on the glove—his arm pressed hers tight to his side.

And though he was a man, he understood. It is not precept or preaching that teaches it. Modesty in a girl is instinctive; and the little lady from the mill-house had known no other teacher than instinct.

Outside the theater an attendant was changing the performance number of *Oh Aunt!* from 316 to 317.

## X

Twenty minutes later, in the large tea-rooms of a fashionable hotel just off the Strand, there was a murmur of interest as a flying-officer, quizzically dejected of countenance, entered with a young lady, who glanced shyly about, and whose fingers held his, timidly but confidently.

He secured a table, and ordered tea from a pleasant waitress. This accomplished, he said something to his companion, who was sitting bolt-



## THE AIRY PRINCE

upright, keeping a steady gaze on her hands crossed on her lap. Smiling a little, she slowly raised her face and looked into his. A young Canadian subaltern, seated at a table with a woman whose overpowdered, meaningless beauty was only too eloquent, stopped in some remark he was making. Something in the French girl's face had sent his mind, smitten with loneliness, speeding across the Atlantic to a home whence a mother and a sister had sent the finest thing they had across the seas.

Near them, two girls, fresh of face, tittered and posed, challenging the eyes of every man who entered, with a brazen immodesty strangely at variance with their appearance of decent breeding. At a farther table a young woman, with a beauty that was marred by too hard a mouth, sat with her mother and listened to that woman's urging that she should marry a wealthy Jew who had asked for her hand. Was it not her duty to herself and to her mother? Besides, even if that young fellow did come back uncrippled from the trenches—which was unlikely—he would have to begin all over again. Alone, a good-looking artist, discharged from the army with wounds, sat

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

with an insouciant, mocking eye, searching for types and adventure. Around him women of all ages, some of them with men, smoked, while their chatter mixed discordantly with the orchestra playing some negroid ragtime piece, and with the sound of rattling tea-cups.

"Your Majesty," said the miller's niece, relapsing into her former style of address, "there is so much I cannot understand."

"Such as what, youngster?"

"These ladies here. Some are so pretty and so nice. Others are pretty and——" Again she shrugged her shoulders as only a French woman can. "I am so young, it is true—but see that lady there."

"With the young Canadian—yes?"

"Somehow, monsieur, she frightens me. I did not know that women ever looked that way—like Louis when he catches a mouse."

"The simile is very apt, Pippa."

"But then"—her brows puckered with a first endeavor to harness language to her psychology—"you can see that nice girl there, so fair and pink."

## THE AIRY PRINCE

"I prefer them dark," said he seriously; "but what of her?"

The expounder of philosophy breathed deeply, but stuck to her task.

"I think," she said, "that the fair girl is nice, but this one is . . ." (shrug) . . . "Then why, monsieur, does the nice one try to look just like the other?—*Regardez-moi ça*—see her now."

He poured out the tea, which had just arrived.

"Shall I tell you a story?" he asked.

She sighed happily. "Tell me a true story," she said with that insistence of the young on making all things believable.

He sipped his tea and frowned meditatively.

"Not long ago, my dear, there lived a stupid king."

"Your father?"

"In any one but you, Pippa, that would be pert. No, he was not my father."

"I wonder if Louis——" she began, but he checked her with a portentous frown.

"Once," he began again, "there lived a stupid king named Convention."

"What a silly name!"



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"Pippa!" he admonished her with a warning finger.

She tried to look serious, but ended by laughing mischievously.

"There was a stupid king with a silly name?" she said encouragingly.

"This king," he said, "was very wise in some things, and often kind, but his courtiers were a poor lot—Hypocrisy, Snobbery, Good and Bad Form, and a lot of others. Now the king used to favor the men among his subjects."

"You mean, he liked men?"

"Yes."

"So do I," she said in an outburst of frankness. "They are so droll."

He poured some fresh tea into the cups.

"This King Convention," he said, after a thoughtful pause, "said that men could do a lot of things that women could not, which made the women very angry. Now the king had a jester named Shaw."

"What is a jester?"

"A man who makes jokes that people may laugh."

"Why do they laugh at jokes?"

## THE AIRY PRINCE

“Well, in England—especially on the stage—it is from the pleasure of meeting old friends. As a race, we are rather sentimental about our jests, and don’t take kindly to new ones.”

She sipped some tea, holding the cup in both hands, but with considerable daintiness.

“Tell me an English joke,” she said.

He stroked his faded little mustache.

“The House of Lords,” he ventured, after some thought.

“*Hé!* Is that funny?”

“Very.”

“I do not laugh. Tell me another.”

He broke a corner off a piece of toast.

“One of the richest bits of humor in England,” he said, “is the idea that children born into wealthy or titled families are superior clay to their fellows.”

Pippa thought tremendously.

“I think, monsieur, I know why you look so sad. It is because of what you have to laugh at in your country. . . . But please go on and tell me what happened to—how say you it?—the jester.”

“Ah yes. Well, G. B. Shaw——”

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“What is this—G. B.?”

“Those are his names—Gor’ Blime Shaw.”

Pippa sighed. It was very difficult to become interested in people of such strange nomenclature.

“What did he, then, this Gor Shaw?” she asked, feeling that the story must end sometime.

“Well, as a matter of fact, he was rather a poor jester, because his only joke was to stand on his head. At first every one laughed; but after a while they thought that it was his natural position, and paid no attention to him. It was really pretty hard on the poor chap, because he was too old to learn any new tricks, and he used to become dizzy from being upside-down so much. Finally he grew furious at the king for not laughing, and urged all the women who did not like Convention to murder him. When the war came along they saw their chance. The men went away, and the real women of England were too busy helping them to bother about anything else. You see, Pippa, in our country we have the noisy, chattering, selfish women who do good by lime-light and find their reward in the illustrated journals. But there are also those, the unrec-



## THE AIRY PRINCE

ognized and unthanked ones, who share others' griefs, but suffer alone. It is the unseen, unheard women of Britain who are really wonderful."

The girl said nothing, but her face, so suggestive of color in its elusive change of expression, softened to a tender mood that left her eyes very dark and somber, and her lips curved slightly into a smile that was full of sympathy.

The young Canadian subaltern looked directly at her and compressed his lower lip with his teeth.

"What's the matter, dearie?" croaked the woman beside him; but he returned no answer.

The two tittering girls stopped their staccato giggling for a moment, then resumed with a steadfastness of purpose that somehow robbed the effect of spontaneity. The young woman with the over-firm mouth took in the tableau of the airman and his little charge, and turned to her mother with some sarcastic comment that was strangely belied by the look of hunger in her eyes. The artist, still with his air of graceful insouciance, sat with half-closed eyelids and visualized Pippa as a subject for canvas. "What a Psyche

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

she would make!" he muttered. The orchestra was just going to play, when the leader, who had been idly gazing at the throng of guests, made a gesture of dissent.

"We shall not do 'Oh, that Opium Rag,' " he said. "You see that girl there, with the dark curls and the sweet little face? For her let us play Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song.' "

Quite unaware of their interested audience, the flying-man and his companion continued their excursion into the realm of fables, while untouched toast and half-emptied cups stood by in neglected array.

"That is practically all the story," he said. "When the war came on, they murdered poor old Convention."

"Oh!"

"Slaughtered him," he said gloomily; "though all his bad courtiers escaped. For a long time it was feared that the king's son, Courtesy, and his niece, Charm (who were very much in love with each other), had also been done to death, but there are rumors that they have been seen in remote parts of England. So, Pippa, that

## THE AIRY PRINCE

is why these young women look and act alike. They are the murderers of Convention."

"Monsieur, I am frightened."

He produced his pipe, received a horrified look from a gorgeous waiter, and hurriedly replaced it in his pocket. "The first thing the women did," he went on, "was to place Vulgarities and his Queen, Stupidity, on the throne; but there are signs that their reign will be brief. When the men come back and the quiet women speak, I think we shall see another Revolution that will put Courtesy and Charm in the place of Vulgarities and Stupidity. So, after all, my dear"—he grew quite cheerful at the thought—"poor old Shaw may have done some good in inciting the murder of Convention. Perhaps, though the thought would annoy him frightfully, he may yet go down to history as a martyr—the reformer who stood on his head!"

But she was not listening to him. She was silently enjoying, for the first time, the fragrance of Mendelssohn's *Melody of Spring*, which found immediate response in her nature, so attuned to the delicate things of life. It had a somewhat contrary effect on the others, whose



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

conversation, which had begun to lag, took on fresh impetus with the sound of the orchestra.

"Tell me," she whispered, vastly puzzled, "why do they talk so loud when there is music?"

He shook his head. "I don't know," he answered. "It is said that music soothes the savage breast—it certainly loosens the civilized tongue."

The charming setting to the happiness of Spring-time, written by a composer who really never grew up, came to an end, and in sheer delight the French girl clapped her hands twice. The leader acknowledged the compliment by bowing. She did not know that it was for her alone he had chosen it.

The airman examined his watch. "Little one," he said, "I am afraid our day is nearly over. In half-an-hour we must catch a train back to 'The Plough and Crown,' where we shall have dinner and a little rest. At eight o'clock two friends of mine from the aerodrome here will bring the machine—you understand that taking young ladies from France to England has not been officially authorized by the Air Ministry. As soon as the stars are out we shall start for home."

## THE AIRY PRINCE

They rose to go.

She smiled shyly at the orchestra, and once more the leader bowed. With the daintiest of gestures she raised her hand and waved to him; then, feeling for her protector's arm, she started for the door, her eyes timidly glancing about her from beneath sheltering, downcast eyelashes. Without the least embarrassment, the tanned airman with the strangely light moustache and eyebrows walked beside her, experiencing an indefinable sense of possession that proved most agreeable.

The artist toyed with an unlit cigarette. "With such a model," he muttered, "if I could only indicate that swift rhythm of expression, I should be great."

The tittering girls kept up their chatter. They had long since learned that nothing stifles thought like meaningless conversation—and they were afraid their thoughts might be unpleasant.

The young woman with the over-firm mouth drew back as the airman and his companion passed her table, but her eyes clung to the French girl's face as though its winsomeness and purity held the answer to her troubles. Swift as imag-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

ination itself, her mind leaped to France, picturing a young fellow who, if he did come back unmaimed, would have to begin all over again.

"Mother," she said, with hot resentment in her voice, "I am entitled to my own life. I have seen too many tragedies in material marriages to dread one of love."

"You are a fool," said the other; and because she was the stronger of the two, she prevailed.

The woman who looked as Louis did when he caught a mouse turned on the Canadian boy, who had followed Pippa with a far-away, dreamy stare.

"What's the matter, dearie?" she queried, with the tedious endearment of her class.

He brought himself from the reveries that had strangely blended the French girl's face with the faces of two other women across the sea; then he looked into his companion's with its leering comeliness. With a quick, decisive movement he rose to his feet, and, feeling for his pocket-book, placed a pound-note on the table.

"Pay for what we've had," he said, his jaw stiffening, but his voice shaking oddly.

"What! aren't I going to see you again?"



## THE AIRY PRINCE

He was going to speak, but changed his mind, and, turning on his heel, strode from the place, his spurs jingling with each step . . . and there was something in his face that made people keep silent as he passed.

### XI

It lacked two hours of midnight when an aeroplane crossed the Channel.

With his feet automatically guiding the rudder and his eyes keeping incessant watch on his compass and the pulsating lights of landing points showing like lighthouses at sea, the Black Cat brought all his conscious mind to bear on the events of the day.

In the whim of the moment, when the rain was on the roof, he had suggested this adventure to the little girl of the lonely mill-house; and for one day London had been hers. He had carried out his plan. Her countless comments, some childish, some strangely mature, were evidence enough of her enjoyment. Then why, he questioned, was he experiencing a dull feeling of depression, as the shadows beneath showed that

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

once more they were over France? To-morrow he would have the zest of battle; again he would lead his squadron in the greatest sport of the ages. . . . Then why this heaviness of spirit?

His mind relapsed into a musing mood that got him no further in his introspective analysis; and his eyes, which had always been a reliable pair, commenced playing odd tricks with him. Though in the daytime he was used to seeing the earth and the horizon, and thus establishing his estimate of distance, he was relying that night almost entirely on his sense of equilibrium, glancing only occasionally at the instruments which would tell him if he were not flying level.

It was the compass that first surprised him.

He was studying its sensitive needle when he noted with some astonishment that the dial had taken on the addition of two dark and most expressive eyes, which proceeded to surround themselves with the delicate features of a girl's face, possessed of a brow that was spiritually white, and dark hair that melted into the blackness of the night.

He shook his head and sought a light on the ground, which, after the manner of "Winking

## THE AIRY PRINCE

Willies," was showing long and short flashes like Morse. To his amazement, the light became a smile, which gradually developed into a most alluring female face. If he had been in possession of his usual sense of the humorous, he would have recalled that Lewis Carroll's cat appeared to Alice in much the same way; but his mind and body were both in the clouds, a realm where cats and humor are uninvited guests.

He next tried a star, which underwent the same evolution. Even the moon was not proof against the phenomenon. Once he half-closed his eyes, but that was worse than ever. Everywhere he looked, there was the same face—smiling, pouting, coquetting, sympathizing, commiserating.

He tried whistling, but it offered no relief.

Behind him, nearly asleep, Pippa sat with closed eyes. To her the solution was much more simple. All day she had had her Prince by her side, her arm in his, her fingers locked with his. Therefore she was happy; also she was tired.

Not having any tiresome masculine mental gyrations to perform in discovering a truth that was so easily apparent, she accepted the situa-



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

tion with sentimental nonchalance, and falling asleep, dreamed that the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens had changed to that of the Airy Prince (who, she thought, was ever so much more handsome), and that she was sitting on the grass admiring him, while rabbits played about his feet. She was awakened from this delightful dream by a sensation similar to that of falling off a ladder in one's sleep; but such is the penalty of those who travel at night by air.

And, applying the laws of logic to the case, when a young gentleman sees dark eyes and curved lips in a compass, and a young woman dreams that the citizens of London have erected a monument to a young gentleman with a long face and glow-worm eyebrows, it is reasonable to suppose that they have fallen in love with each other.

But strange things happen in the month of April.

## XII

She had just fallen asleep for the second time, when the cessation of the engines woke her, and

## THE AIRY PRINCE

a few moments later they had descended in a field adjoining his aerodrome.

He jumped from the pilot's seat and lifted her out. "Quick, Pippa," he said. "They'll be here in a few minutes for the machine. I had to land here because that light was my only guide. Do you see that heavy tree over there by the road? Wait by it until I return with a motor-cycle. Hurry, youngster; they're coming."

She did as he bade her, and took refuge in the shadow of a huge tree, just as men's voices told her the mechanics had come. The rolling of distant guns, like thunder echoing through cavernous depths, traveled on the wings of the wind and left her heart fluttering from a sudden contraction of pain. For one day, in the restful meadows of England and in the fascination of the unmarred City of Adventure, she had forgotten France's agony. With the thought came a sudden bitterness.

Ten minutes later she heard him coming with a motor-cycle, to which a side-car was attached. She took her seat in the car, and he fastened the rubber cover over her knees. Then, opening the

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

throttle, they sped through the night towards her home.

It was just twenty minutes to twelve when they reached the mill. Hurrying across the foot-bridge which spanned the chute, she entered the cottage and lit the lamp.

“Louis!” she cried. “Louis!”

That patient feline awoke from slumber and stretched in the most blasé manner; but his little mistress, gathering him in her arms, pressed her cheek against his head, asking a dozen questions at once, to which he deigned no reply other than blinking into space and licking his chops, as though the ways of women were beyond him, but ’twere best to let them have their own way.

The airman followed her in. . . . The prevaricating clock continued its dilatory march of time. Marshal Joffre was, if anything, more paternal than before, and the geranium-colored table cover lent its unsubtle glow to the scene.

“Good-by, Pippa,” he said.

The girl stood motionless, and there was a quick stab in her heart. She had known that this moment would come, but had kept her thoughts from it . . . and now . . . he was going. . . .



## THE AIRY PRINCE

Once more she would have only her little world of make-believe. She released the cat from her arms and turned her eyes away.

"You have been very kind, monsieur," she said.

He fingered his helmet absent-mindedly. "Did you enjoy it?" he asked aimlessly.

"It was wonderful," she said quietly, still looking into distance; "I have seen so much. This morning I was just a little girl, but now——"

His fingers ceased turning the helmet, and he frowned at it intently. "We do not grow old with years but by moments," he said. "For a long time one is a child; then there comes an instant of suffering, or of love . . . and one is no longer a child. That is all."

She slowly sank into a chair by the table, and, folding her hands, appeared engrossed in the table cover. "Your Majesty," she said, "do you remember the poor lady with the violets?"

"Yes, Pippa."

"What did she say to you?"

He smiled awkwardly. "It—it is rather hard to explain, little one. She told me to—to take care of you."

"Why did she say that?" she asked without

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

removing her eyes for a moment from the table.

“Well—perhaps you do not know this—but men are sometimes very unkind to women.”

“I know, monsieur. Simon Barit, he often beats his wife.”

He sat down on a chair opposite her. “There are many more ways of being cruel than that,” he said. “Sometimes a kiss, or the gift of a flower, is worse than a blow. Often, Pippa, men play with women’s hearts as—well, as Louis does with a spool.”

A shadow fell on her face. “I think I understand, monsieur. That poor lady was afraid I should fall in love with you, but that you would not love me.”

“That is partly what she meant.”

Pippa rose and walked to the window. “Tonight I think,” she said, after a minute’s silence, “that women have the most sorrow in life.”

“They do, little one.”

“But also the most joy, monsieur.”

He rested his chin on his hand, but said nothing.

“All to-day,” resumed the girl, “when men seemed happiest it was because they were with

## THE AIRY PRINCE

women. Also when they looked most cruel—you perhaps know what I mean—there were women there too with the faces that frightened me. And all those lovely children playing in the park—always they seemed so merry because their mothers were near them. But also, you remember the poor soldier in the chair?—no legs and but one arm. His face was so sad until once the lady with him—a nurse, you said—spoke to him and he looked at her and smiled. It was lovely, monsieur. I think I wept a little.”

He made no comment, but his left hand ran slow arpeggios on the table. From the window she could see the water of the chute, all silvery in the moonlight.

“So to-night, monsieur,” she went on, “I am not the same as this morning. Then I thought that we who are women are the happiest; but now I think, in the real world, it is we who give pleasure or unhappiness. Perhaps, monsieur”—she turned around and faced him—“perhaps a woman finds joy only when she gives it to others.”

He looked at her, and his eyebrows were raised in wonder. When he had said we grow old by



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

moments, was it more than just a well-turned phrase?

She returned to her chair by the table.

“When Louis and I are alone,” she murmured, “I shall not dream the same as before. Then we had only young people, brave and handsome, but now I shall pretend that there are many old and sad ones, who perhaps will be glad if I am with them. And——”

“Pippa, my dear”—he looked into her eyes that met his without timidity, and there was a pleading note in his voice—“you may be lonely here, but you saw to-day how many discouraged, unhappy people there are—how much sickness and unkindness there is. Keep to your little world here with its Fairy Princes and the music of the wind. It is better, Pippa. . . . Perhaps it is even more real than the other.”

She smiled, patiently, and, for the second time that day, felt a motherly pity for his youthfulness.

“Your Majesty,” she said, “in my book, *The Fairy Prince*, the girl sings a song about love, and she asks her mother, ‘*Est-ce plaisir, est-ce tourment?*’ I know now that it is both. Ah! I

## THE AIRY PRINCE

think it is too wonderful to be a woman; for some day, perhaps yes, perhaps no, I shall have my own children and a husband and friends. And sometimes, when my husband, he is much discouraged if the mill makes no money, though he works so hard, or if my children are perhaps sick and cry—then it is I who smile and say: ‘*Mes enfants*’—for he, too, will be only a big child—‘*Mes enfants*, can you see the sunshine? Do you hear the birds? Can you smell these flowers?—So!’ *Et alors*—perhaps they smile too. So I sing a pretty song and say to my husband ‘*Courage, mon ami!* Have you not your little wife?’ And after that we are all happy. . . . And now, that is why I think it is so wonderful to be a woman.”

The clock hiccoughed, and struck eight.

The airman looked at his watch. “By Jove, it is midnight!” he said. “Pippa, our day is over——”

Tears sprang to her eyes, and her hands groped for his. “But no, monsieur,” she cried, “you must not go. It will be so lonely.”

He leaned over and covered her little hands

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

with his large, tanned ones. "It will be lonely for me as well," he said.

"But you will come back, Your Majesty? Perhaps—next Easter?"

He gently stroked her hand. "On my honor," he said, "I will come on the Tuesday at dawn. You will be there?"

He released her hands as she slowly rose and crossed once more to the window.

"At daybreak," she said very quietly, gazing at the steely brilliance of the running water, "I will watch from the hill. And if you do not come, though I shall weep a little, I shall say, 'He is fighting, and could not leave for little Pippa. Next year he will come.'"

"And supposing, little one, he does not come the next year either?"

She leaned her arm against the window-pane and rested her cheek on it. "I shall watch again at dawn, monsieur"—the words were spoken very slowly—"and I shall say, 'He is not coming. . . . He has gone to be with his brothers who went, out into the sunlight, smiling so bravely——'"



## THE AIRY PRINCE

Her words ended in a half-sob, and she pressed her face with both hands.

“But every Easter,” she said, her voice very soft and trembling, “on the Tuesday I will watch the dawn from the hill, and perhaps, monsieur, you will see me.”

He stood motionless for a moment, slowly reached for her leather coat and helmet, and placed them over his arm. “Good-by, Pippa,” he said, and he held out his hands.

Timidly, and with cheeks that went all white, then crimson, she came towards him and raised her face for him to kiss. For a moment he held her in his arms, which quivered oddly. . . . Then, stooping, he gently kissed her—not on the up-turned, trembling lips, but on the cheek, just beside her mouth.

Without a word he gently released her from his arms, flung the door open and went out into the night.

Motionless, with the burning memory of his hot lips upon her cheek, she stood until the sound of his footsteps was lost in the song of the chute. Slowly her hands dropped to her side and she sank into the chair by the table. The cat looked

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

up from the task of licking his paws, and sprang upon her lap.

“Louis!” she cried, smothering him in an embrace that threatened to snuff out his nine lives prematurely, while tears from her eyes fell glistening on his fur. “Louis!”

# MR. CRAIGHOUSE OF NEW YORK, SATIRIST

## I

A RAW wind from the sea swept against the mammoth building of the *New York Monthly Journal*. The editor of that classic publication stretched his arms lazily, then crossed to the rattling window and looked at Broadway, far beneath. A few belated flakes of snow mingled with the dust that eddied about in little whirlpools of wind. Like gnomes, the people hurried on in an endless diverging torrent of humanity, slouch-hats of soldiers adding a strangely Western effect to the usual bizarre scene.

The telephone rang, and the editor, Mr. E. H. Townsend, left the window to answer it.

"Yes?" he said. "Mr. Craighouse? Send him right in."

He took from a drawer a box of notoriously



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

expensive cigars, and laid it on his desk. The reasonings of Dr. Watson himself could hardly have failed to deduce that the visitor was of some importance.

A moment later a young man, in the uniform of a United States officer, knocked, and, in response to the invitation, entered the inner temple. Mr. Townsend offered him the arm-chair, and reached for the cigars.

"You look well in uniform," he said, after appropriate comments on the April weather had been made by both.

"Thanks. I received your note this morning asking me to call."

"Ah yes. By-the-by, you are sailing soon, I believe?"

"Any time, now; naturally, we don't know to a day."

"What branch of the Service are you with?"

"The Engineers."

The editor thrust his hands into his pockets. "That is odd," he said. "Did you know anything about engineering?"

"A little." The young man's voice was abrupt, but not unmusical. His brain had always been

alert, and army training was making his voice so. "I was a science grad. at Harvard."

The editor gazed out of the window again. "You are a remarkable combination, Mr. Craighouse," he said. "There is nothing more stifling to the artistic nature than a purely scientific training; in fact, the influence of this journal has always been used against absolutely technical schools. Almost the first requisite of any artist is a keen appreciation of the intangible; science deals only with things that can be proved. I often nurse along a young writer if he is incoherent because, as frequently happens, his temperament is greater than his technique. Scientists always marshal their facts well, but they never soar to the heights."

The editor tapped the window gently, the young officer gazing quizzically at him the while. They were a strangely contrasted pair, the editor in the autumn of life, with the calm voice and bearing of one who has fastened routine to art, and become jaded in the process; the young man keenly alert, with eyes that never lost their restlessness, and thin, satirical lips that mocked the high forehead of a philosopher.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"I am greatly interested in your writing," said the editor, after rather a lengthy pause.

The officer smiled. "Is that why you rejected my last two manuscripts?"

"Yes. Neither of them did you credit. Both of them betrayed rather a nasty cynicism in your style."

"I meant them for satire."

"Ah! there is a great difference. Cynicism recoils on the cynic; satire is always delightful, and is never offensive. However, I may say, in spite of their faults, if you survive the war you should become one of America's finest writers."

The young man flushed with pleasure. "Thanks very much, Mr. Townsend."

"You have temperament and you have language," went on the editor, "and, though your emotions are artificial and your judgments too impetuous, that is a natural condition of youth—nature has to keep something to recompense us for growing old. But you have big moments, plus some most promising incoherency, as I said before, and when that chaos becomes cosmos, the world will acknowledge you. You have never been to England before, have you?"



The officer shook his head, a little puzzled at the abrupt descent from the abstract.

Mr. Townsend smoked reflectively for a full minute. "England," he said slowly, "is the paradox of the ages. In America we have the present and the future; England has the present and the past—principally the past. Inefficiency is often no bar to success there—as a matter of fact, an Englishman dislikes appearing efficient—but remember that the British Navy is the most thorough organization in the world. I have often thought that England's success in colonization was largely due to her utter inability to understand the temperament of the people she governed. Look at Canada. There was never an Englishman who really appreciated the restless independence of the Canadian; yet, when the Old Land goes to war, Canada sends and maintains a mighty fine army corps to help her. Listen, my boy. I want you to go to England with your pores open; receive impressions and make a note of them. I want a series of articles explaining England to America—not as it is being done by those polished gentlemen who visit us from London, but by an American for Ameri-

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

cans. Don't send me a description of the Strand, or Westminster Abbey, or your thoughts on first seeing the Thames. Go deep. I want a series of articles that rise above journalism. I want the psychology of England written up in a light satirical vein by a clever man with red blood in his veins. You will be there for some time, I suppose?"

"Very likely, as we are the first of the vanguard."

A half-hour later the young officer rose to go, with a contract that promised him generous remuneration, in return for which he had agreed to write ten articles on England. He stood, facing the older man, and smiled slightly. He had removed his cap, and his black hair, struggling into an unruly curl, combined with his dark, brilliant eyes in an appearance of arresting virility.

"You are very encouraging, Mr. Townsend," he said. "I had no idea that an editor could be so—so nearly human."

"My son," said the older man, "we are literature's midwives, toiling year in and year out in

the hope that some day we shall assist at the birth of a masterpiece."

"But how is it that you don't write yourself?"

The editor shrugged his shoulders. "Why does a hangman never commit a murder?" he said.

## II

Three weeks later a great ocean liner, known since the war as H.M. Transport, No. —, dropped gracefully down the river towards the open sea. Craighouse, from the hurricane-deck, watched the amazing silhouette of New York, as her mighty buildings stood outlined against the darkening skyline. From the wharf came the strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner," and hundreds of handkerchiefs fluttered in farewell.

A British cruiser was lying at anchor, and a thousand bluejackets roared three mighty British cheers for the new crusaders. A bedlam of shouting from the transport acknowledged the compliment, and one American soldier, whose constant attendance at baseball matches had produced stentorian qualities within him, boomed out the words, "Good old Roast Beef!"



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Every one laughed. Why not? Men always laugh readily when their emotions are playing leapfrog with each other.

The strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner" sounded fainter; the handkerchiefs were blurred into a fluttering white cloud. A French battleship lay a quarter of a mile from them. As they passed it a bugle sounded on board, followed by a salvo of cheers from the crew. Craighouse noticed that the French cheers were a full third higher in pitch than the British.

Another roar came from the transport, and all eyes were turned towards the stentorian private. He took a deep breath.

"Good old Froggy!" he bellowed, and two or three soldiers laughed. To America, France is the martyr of the ages, and there is a strange sense of the feminine in the affection which the Old World republic inspires in the New. Truly, the ways of an extempore humorist are unhappy.

They passed the Battery, and, nearing the open sea, received the blessing of the Statue of Liberty extending her welcome to all that are weary and discouraged.

Craighouse experienced a thrill of patriotism,

and, feeling that he must express it in language, turned to his nearest neighbor, who happened to be a British officer. "That's an inspiring sight," he said.

"Which?" said the Englishman briefly.

"The Statue of Liberty," answered Craighouse with the tone of a 4th of July orator. "That is the spirit of America—equality for all, freedom of thought and action, liberty for every one."

"Oh yes—splendid," commented the Englishman politely.

There was silence for a moment, and then, in a burst of inexcusable chauvinism, Craighouse said, "You haven't anything like that in England, have you?"

"No," said the English officer casually; "but we had an army in France two weeks after war was declared. I say, do come and have a drink."

### III

Three months later the editor of the *New York Monthly Journal* received a letter from Craighouse. Adjusting his glasses, he settled comfortably into his chair and read it.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“MY DEAR PATRON,—I hope you have not been disappointed at my lack of articles, but, to be candid, I have not struck the proper mental balance yet.

“England is delightful; England is absurd. I was on a bus yesterday, and the conductress gave the signal to go ahead by hammering the side with the fare-box. It fascinated me. Incidentally, the girls have wonderful complexions over here, but they do not dress as cleverly as ours. I know you will say it is war-time, but nothing is powerful enough to interfere with anything so fundamental as a woman’s clothes.” (“A bit labored, but quite good,” muttered the editor.)

“The country, as you know, is like a garden, with all a garden’s charm and limitations. I don’t feel yet that I can take a deep breath. There are woods; but the trees seem to huddle together for want of space, and one always feels that just the other side of the woods there is a town or a village. England is lovely, but I feel the lack of immensity. To me, the whole effect is that the country is complete; there is nothing more to do. Everything that can be built has been



built.” (“And well built, too,” muttered Mr. Townsend.) “In fact, I don’t see what there is over here to employ to the full the brains, the nerves, and the imagination of a full-blooded *homo*. Again I return to the garden simile. Is the task of maintenance big enough for the splendid specimens of manhood that England rears?

“I feel that there is something wrong with the public-school system. Not that it is inefficient, but rather that it is too thorough in its results. Judging superficially, of course, it seems that the public school ignores the fact that every one is born an individual, and proceeds to produce a type. To use a vulgarism, it is a high-class scholastic sausage-machine. It takes in variegated ingredients, and turns out uniformity of product. It instructs the youth of the land in the manly virtues of past ages, but appears to ignore the creative instinct. Public-school men are the Greek chorus of England’s national drama; they seldom provide either the dramatist or the principal actors.

“My biggest disappointment has been the English stage. I know our ‘playsmiths’ are futile enough, but we would never endure in New York

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

what is put on at many first-class London theaters. At a time when her grandsons from the four corners of the world are paying, in most cases, their first visit to the Old Country, England offers them the spectacle of a once classic stage given over to inanity and vulgarity. Of course, there are two or three producers who still maintain a commendable standard of art, but in the majority of first-class London theaters one finds a coarseness of innuendo, an utter lack of refinement, and an almost total elimination of humor. In their musical shows the producers still go in for the type of comedian known on Broadway as 'hard-boiled'—the kind that carries his own jests in a valise, and whose *pièce de résistance* is the word 'damn,' which seldom fails to convulse the audience. If I may coin a phrase, I would say the aim of some London producers is 'to be vulgar without being funny.' " ("I wonder if that is original," observed the editor.)

"I like the restraint of the better English newspapers, and there are still five or six monthly journals that demand a high standard of writing from their contributors. Some of the popular English magazines, however, publish stories that

## MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

would hardly pass muster as a blushing school-girl's first attempt at authorship. I remember my mother used to say to me, 'Out of nothing, nothing comes.' She had obviously never seen one of these fiction magazines.

"Judging by the advertisements in these publications and in the society illustrated papers, I would say that manufacturing women's underwear, or 'undies,' as they are coyly called, is the greatest commercial industry here. The advertisements state that an officer can send a lady a complete set of these garments with his regimental crest on them. I am still trying to gauge the mental attitude of an officer who would do so.

"The political situation puzzles me. Lloyd George looks like a mighty big man, but he has to spend most of his time dodging snipers from behind. Nero fiddled while Rome was burning, but a certain section of the House of Commons goes in for absolute symphonies while Britain is locked in the death-grip with Germany. But she's a dear old country, and her people are as brave and cheery as in the days when she was Merrie England, and not England of Many Sorrows.

"To hear her people talk, you would think that



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

the Canadians and the Australians had done all the fighting, and that the United States was the savior of the world; but I know there's hardly a home in England or Scotland that hasn't lost a son—and often the last son too. And when the old families send their boys, it's right into the trenches, not back on the lines of communication.

“There—you can see why I have not written before. Incoherency alone is hardly sufficient. I haven't seriously sorted my impressions as yet. As you would say, the chaos has not yet become cosmos.

“By-the-by, the British Navy mothered us from the coast of Ireland like an eagle with her young.

“Every one is most cordial, and invitations are showered on us from every quarter. I'm going to-morrow to visit the Earl of Lummersdale, who seems to want to entertain a real, live American. As I have six days' leave, I'm going to let him. They tell me he comes of a very old family, so look out for an article on the aristocracy.

“This letter is rambling most aimlessly. I suppose you are bored to tears. Just a minute,

MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

till I read over what I have written. . . . Yes—I might add in my comments on the English theater that a chap named Beecham is doing opera in English, and it's pretty nearly the finest opera I have ever heard. Then, of course, Barrie produces a play every now and then, just to show that he hasn't lost his genius of tenderness and whimsical charm.

“Perhaps my visit to the Earl of Lummersdale will crystallize some of my vagrant impressions. Good-by, dear patron.—Faithfully yours,

LAWRENCE CRAIGHOUSE (Lt.),  
c/o American Officers' Club, London.

“P. S.—We're working like beavers getting things ready for the American Army which is coming. It looks slow, but when Uncle Sam's men are ready, Fritz is going to enjoy a real avalanche. This, I promise you.

“L. C.”

IV

One morning a south coast train contained a first-class compartment which was shared by Lieutenant Craighouse, U.S.A., and a timorously proper gentleman who read the *Times* for

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

twenty minutes, and then stared at nothing very intently—an art highly developed amongst those who worship at the shrine of good form.

Craighouse was silent also for over an hour, which was a feat of the first magnitude for him. He was thinking of some official figures shown to him, in confidence, a week past—figures which gave the totals of England's manufacture of munitions and guns, her construction of aeroplanes and tanks, her production of all the minutiae of war essentials, in quantities which his brain could hardly grasp.

Judged by any standard, the achievement was amazing. For a nation at peace it would have been stupendous; but, in addition, this country that amused Americans, this nation of obsolete methods and lack of organization, had held the seas open and frustrated Germany's plans on land. He wondered if he had been a fool—if, after all, the English were not the most efficient race on earth. Just then an advertisement, conspicuously placed beside the mirror in the compartment, smote his eye, and he gasped.

“How many people ride in a carriage like this in one day?” he asked abruptly.



MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

The well-bred one cleared his throat and shook his head. They had not been introduced; and, besides, he didn't know.

"Ten, twenty, forty—say thirty?" said Craighouse.

"Very probably—oh, yes—rather—quite." The words were decorously languid.

"Thirty people a day," went on Craighouse rapidly; "say a thousand a month. In a year that would mean, roughly—oh, put it at ten thousand. Am I right?"

The Englishman shifted uneasily. "Very probably—oh yes—rather—quite."

"The war has been going on for three years." The American was warming to his subject. "Three years mean that approximately thirty thousand passengers have traveled in this compartment since the beginning of the war, eh?"

His companion reached for his cigarettes. "Very probably," he said. "Oh yes—rath——"

"How many of these carriages are in use?" interrupted Craighouse. "Two hundred, four hundred—say three hundred?"

"Very probably—oh yes——"

"I may be short or long on that estimate, but

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

putting it at three hundred, this line has had about—well, roughly, nine million first-class passengers. Is that correct?”

“Very pro——”

“Then, great Scott! look at the advertisement behind you, the most prominent one in the compartment. This line has had a chance to have a heart-to-heart talk with nine million average, well-to-do passengers. From the standpoint of propaganda, figure out the national importance of that. From the commercial point of view, estimate the value of that space. And yet, after three years of war, it says that the steamship line from Newhaven to Dieppe is the shortest route to Austria, south Germany, and Spain! And it gives a map! Austria, south Germany, and Spain!——” The American’s tirade ended in a splutter of indignation.

The train stopped at a junction station, and both men emerged, the Englishman proffering his cigarettes.

“Thanks very much,” said Craighouse, taking one. “Good-morning.” And he disappeared into the crowd.

The Englishman paused to light his cigarette.

“What extraordinary people these Americans are!” he said to himself—which recalls the well-known saying of a Quaker to his wife, “Every one is queer but thee and me; and thou beest a little queer.”

V

When one passed the lodge which guarded the entrance to the Lummersdale estate, all sense of present-day responsibilities fell away like a cloak. Decades made no impression upon Oaklands; centuries very little. The family was surrounded by traditions; the past pointed the way to each succeeding generation, as sign-posts direct itinerant motor-cars upon their course. A Lummersdale never was forced to plan his own future, and there is no record of one ever having done so. Whoever bore the proud title felt that his children did not really belong to him; he was but a pruner, and they were branches to be trimmed to an absolute uniformity. A Lummersdale must resemble nothing so much as a Lummersdale; the associations of Oaklands and a judicious period spent at a public school suc-



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

ceeded admirably in effecting the required standardization.

To this home Lieutenant Craighouse, of the U.S.A. Engineers, brought his ultra-modern and Western Hemispheric personality. Like all men born in a republic, he had instinctive leanings towards Socialism; like most men of artistic tastes, he was distinctly susceptible to luxury. He snorted disapprovingly when the castle-like turrets of Oaklands appeared, but he drank in the green of the lawns and the colors of the flowers like a desert traveler who finds a pool in his path.

The earl and his lady welcomed him with simple dignity, spoke of the pleasure it afforded them to entertain an American officer; and the butler then took charge of him. Craighouse made a facetious remark to that gentleman as they went upstairs, but received no encouragement. Within the precincts of his chamber he made another attempt with creditable bonhomie, but Mr. Watkins's reply was not stimulating.

"Your bath, sir, is next door, and will be ready for you immediately. The family breakfasts at nine; lunch is at one-thirty, tea at five;

## MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

and dinner is served at eight-fifteen. The gong is sounded, and the family assembles in the saloon." Whereupon, with an air of deferential superiority, Mr. Watkins cruised from the room with no apparent physical effort whatever.

Luncheon produced Second Lieutenant Viscount Oaklands, the twenty-year-old son and heir, who was leaving that afternoon to join the —th Horse Guards in France. He was of good athletic physique, and had a high, clear complexion which spoke not only of an out-of-door life, but a clean one as well. He was rather languid, and, in an amiable, impersonal way, appeared somewhat bored. The second son, on three days' leave from Dartmouth, was two years younger, but differed very little from the viscount in any other respect.

There was also a daughter. (Craighouse knew instinctively that, if the countess had been enumerating her family, she would have said, "I also have a daughter.") She was apparently twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, possessed of an exquisite skin, eyes which were both blue and deep, and a golden luxury of hair. With all these fundamentals of feminine beauty, her

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

appearance was rather disappointing—a lack of animation in the eyes, a stolidity about the mouth. Craighouse felt, like Pygmalion, that if this statue could only come to life she would be irresistible.

The conversation at lunch consisted of flattering questions about America's preparations—questions to which Craighouse, who was never an economist in words, did full justice. They all said that it was perfectly splendid of America to come into the war; in fact, they didn't know what Britain would have done without her.

"I know," blurted Craighouse. "She'd have gone on fighting until every family was drained to the last man; and, by Jove! I believe the women would have carried on then. America is going to make victory possible, thank God! but England never would have been beaten."

He stopped, surprised at his own vehemence. The Earl of Lummersdale protested that he was too generous. The countess echoed her husband's opinion. The sub and naval cadet sons supported their parents' protests languidly. The daughter, in acknowledged order of precedence, ended the chorus by the statement that it was ripping of him to say so. Had they been dis-



## MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

cussing the commentaries of Cæsar they could not have shown less enthusiasm. Craighouse pictured a similar situation at home if an English officer had paid a corresponding compliment. He had not learned as yet that carrying emotional moderation to excess is part of the English paradox.

At four that afternoon a trap drove up to the door, and the kit of Viscount Oaklands appeared followed a moment later by that young gentleman himself. He kissed his mother, and gave his sister a half-embrace; then he shook hands with his paternal progenitor, and nodded to his younger brother.

“Good-by, old man,” he said, shaking hands with Craighouse. “Look me up if you ever get near the regiment, won’t you?”

For a few minutes every one spoke of the military situation, the delightful fellow-officers he would have, and other things which well-bred people talk of. Amidst all this the trap started, then stopped at a sign from the viscount.

“I say, dad.”

“Yes, Douglas?”

“Do tell Edwards to see that the hounds get

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

some exercise this week.—Cheer-o, mater!” And thus the eldest son and heir to Oaklands, which he was never to see again, went to the war.

### VI

Dazed at the bloodlessness of the scene, feeling his heart torn by the apparent lack of depth in the most primeval of all emotions, the parent love, Craighouse strolled away, to find that the daughter was by his side.

“You will miss your brother,” he said.

“We shall,” she said; “though, as a matter of fact, I haven’t seen much of Douglas the last three or four years.”

“How is that?”

“Oh, he was at Eton, and only home during the holidays. I was always away at those times; and, of course, he’s been training for the last year.”

“He is joining the Horse Guards?”

“Yes. The eldest son always goes into the army until he succeeds to the title.”

“And the second son?”

“The navy.”

A smile lurked in the corners of his mouth. “Supposing the second son proved a bad sailor, what then?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I suppose he would stay on shore, and probably go to the devil.”

He stooped to pick a blade of grass, and munched it meditatively. “And what happens to the girls?” he asked, after a pause.

Her lips, which were like pomegranates, straightened into a line. “The girls are not of great account,” she said, a note of suppressed tension in her voice, which he quite failed to note. “We are educated in a sort of a way, introduced to the arts, but not allowed to pursue the acquaintanceship; then we marry—if at all—some one of our set and everybody says, ‘Didn’t she do well to get him?’”

“And then?”

Again she made a pretty shrug with her shoulders. “Then we move into our new homes, which are much the same as the old ones, and we bring up a family of descendants for our husbands. When the husband dies, the eldest



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

male child takes over the estate, and his wife rules in the mother's place."

"And she leaves, in her declining years, the home which, naturally, she has grown to love?"

"Yes. Why not?"

For several moments neither spoke. Always hasty in its judgments, his brain was fired with a rankling sense of injustice. He thought he saw the explanation of the bloodless good-by to the viscount. The mental inertia of the sons and the emotional placidity of the girl were natural consequences of a hereditary system which dulled personalities and drove initiative into the scrap-heap of tradition. It was monstrous that one's future and entity should be planned like the life of a hot-house plant; it was no longer a puzzle to him that England's real leaders and thinkers sprang from obscurity. He thanked "whatever gods there be" that he was born in a country which had only one tradition—that it once rebelled against the past.

He turned towards the girl and gazed argumentatively into her very deep and very blue eyes; then he gasped, and a far-away look crept into his own dark, restless ones.

MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

*"Galatea,"* he said, *"is coming to life."*

Subconsciously she had caught his spirit of resentment, and, being a woman, she thrilled to the sense of rebellion in his nature. With the unlocking of her emotions had come the sparkle in the blue depths of her eyes, and the animation which had lit at once the dormant radiancy of her beauty—and his sudden admiration. In addition—though none was needed—the mellowing sun lingered on her hair till it seemed like strands of gold.

"You look like a wild rose," he said irrelevantly, then dashed on into a sea of words. "Are you content with this? Do you never feel a divine restlessness in your nature, urging you to be the architect of your own fate? Are you satisfied to be a mere link in the chain of generations? Surely the individualistic instinct is not dead in this country?"

He paused, rather astonished, but quite pleased with his burst of oratory.

"What would you have me do?"

"Anything—everything that expresses your own personality. Be yourself, and get away from type."

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

"I have done a little."

"What? Appeared in a few charity *tableaux vivants*? Posed for your photo in the *Sketch* as a woman interested in war work?"

"I am sorry," she said demurely, "that you disapprove of me."

"Great Scott!" he said, thrusting his hands into his pockets with an air of defiance, "you are one of the most charming women I've ever seen." He drew himself up to his full height. "But before I succumb to the beauty of these surroundings and the—the—loveliest——"

"Yes? Please don't hesitate."

"You are mocking me."

"Not at all, Don Quixote. Only why shy at the windmill?"

He surveyed her carefully with his head cocked to one side. "I believe you have a sense of humor," he said.

"The daughter of an earl humorous?" She laughed gaily, and her beauty was exceedingly good to look upon.

An uncomfortable feeling crept into the mind of Lawrence Craighouse, officer and satirist, that, though armed with the broadsword of masculine



MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

self-assurance, he was being beaten by the stiletto of feminism. His embarrassment, however, was broken by the approach of a servant.

"Pardon me," said Lady Dorothy. "It's the mail."

She took from the salver a letter, which bore the stamp of the Red Cross, and opened it.

"I am so glad," she said, looking up at him; "I have been accepted for France."

"As what?"

"As a V.A.D., my dear knight. I have been one for two years."

He began to think that his broadsword was decidedly worsted, but he made one final and thoroughly masculine attempt to retain the posture of superiority.

"I supposed you soothed a great many convalescent and gallant lieutenants?" he said airily. It was a lamentable attempt, but he felt a sudden jealousy of all wounded subalterns.

She pirouetted daintily.

"I was in a Tommies' hospital," she said; "and when I wasn't scrubbing floors I was waiting on the nurses at table—and you have no idea what cats some of them were."

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Whereupon Lawrence Craighouse of New York handed over his sword and surrendered unconditionally.

### VII

Three days later Craighouse wrote another letter to Mr. Townsend. That gentleman read it with great interest, and noted particularly these passages: "They have a library, but nearly every book I have opened has uncut pages." "The daughter, Lady Dorothy Oaklands by name, is quite good-looking, but mentally and emotionally she is asleep." "The old boy showed me the portraits of his ancestors this morning. I made the mistake of asking what each one *did*. It appears that they merely *were*." "I am trying an experiment in feminine psychology—I am acting Pygmalion to Lady Dorothy's Galatea." "The earl appears to be very rich, but quite respectable." "We had some titled women to lunch to-day. I have at last found out what countesses talk about—how to secure exemption for their gardeners. It has quite done away with the former vice of gossip." "Lady Dorothy

## MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

plays the piano rather nicely, but with no soul." "Have I mentioned the daughter, Lady Dorothy? She is refreshingly beautiful at times." "I do like the speaking voices of English women when they are not putting on side. Lady Dorothy has a contralto lilt in her voice that is rather pleasing." "Dinner is a tremendous affair. A prune may constitute a course, but nothing reduces the ritual performed by the high priest and his assistant."

That evening Mr. Townsend looked over the table at his wife.

"My dear," he said, "what happens when an American young man falls in love with the daughter of an English earl?"

"Why, both families object, naturally," said the companion of his joys and sorrows.

## VIII

It was the last evening before his departure, and Lady Dorothy had played for him for an hour; played little melodies from *La Bohème*, lesser gems from *Chu Chin Chow*, and twice had explored the delightful memories of Gilbert and



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

Sullivan. Once he sang very softly to her accompaniment, and when they finished she turned abruptly to him.

"You have a voice," she said.

"You play beautifully," he answered.

"It is easy to play when an artist is listening."

"Have you found that, too?"

She turned to the piano and softly fingered the opening strains of Rudolpho's aria in the first act of *La Bohème*.

"It is just a matter of personality," he said softly. "One woman chokes a man's artistry; another reveals the heights which are in his soul. I suppose it is the same with men?"

She played on in silence for a few moments, then murmured, "What happened to the statue when it came to life?"

"You mean Galatea?"

She nodded her head.

"I don't know," he said pensively. "I have quite forgotten the ending."

She went on playing, and in the soothing light of the music-room she made a picture that lingered for months in his memory.

MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

"Some day I will tell you," she said suddenly. "Here are mother and dad."

That night, while in the act of disrobing, he heard the calm knock of Mr. Watkins at his door.

"Come in," he said. "I am going at seven tomorrow morning."

"Very good, sir."

Mr. Watkins carefully placed a pitcher of hot water on the stand.

"Are you married, Watkins?"

The butler considered deferentially. "No, sir," he said, after mature reflection.

"You ought to be," said the American.

The butler carefully drew the window-curtains together. "Are you, sir?"

"No," said Craighouse with great energy; "but when I do marry it will be with some girl born in the United States of America."

Mr. Watkins drifted towards the door. "Your bath will be ready at six, and breakfast at six-thirty," he said.

What Mr. Watkins had taken for persiflage was in reality another American declaration of independence.

IX

It was late in March, 1918, that two American officers sat by the side of a road in France and watched a stream of refugees go by in an endless pageant of misery. Old men crawled along on bleeding, ill-shod feet; women were carrying grotesque bundles and leading absurd ponies that drew household goods on rickety carts; and there were girls, half-women, who bore infants in their arms, and who looked neither to right nor left, but followed on in mute fatigue and tearless agony.

Craighouse, who wore the badges of a captain, swore softly to himself. His companion bit his lip.

"I hear the Germans are smashing through everywhere," said the latter.

"God! I wonder if we have been too late."

Several ambulances passed in rapid succession, their bandaged and bleeding occupants lying crowded together.

A girl, less than eighteen years of age, dropped to the ground opposite to them. In a bound



Craighouse was by her side and had lifted her to her feet. For a moment his strong hands gripped her arms tenaciously as though he would transmit some of his strength to her.

Without a word, without a look at him, she freed herself and staggered on, her face livid except where a slight flush showed beneath the black hollows of her eyes.

Craighouse went back to the other officer, but his face was gray and drawn, while his clenched fists drove the nails into his palms. His companion cursed blasphemously.

The roar of the guns grew louder, like a storm that is driven on the wings of a hurricane. They heard the snorting of engines behind them, and looking quickly, they saw a long line of London omnibuses crowded with English soldiers. They were shouting encouragement to the refugees, and waved gaily as they passed the Americans.

"Those chaps will be in action in an hour," said Craighouse, and swallowed noticeably. "Simpson," he went on, "do you realize that it's little England who has kept this thing from us for three and a half years? It's England who stood by her word; and now that she's drained

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

of her men and boys, she doesn't reproach Russia for letting her down; she hasn't uttered a word of impatience for our slow arrival—asking nothing for herself, blaming no one. It's little England who is gathering the spear-points into her breast that your children and mine may live like human beings!"

His companion rose to his feet, and his jaw stiffened ominously. He felt for his revolver-holster and adjusted his haversack.

"Tell the O.C. I've deserted," he said grimly. "I'm going up the line to join the first bunch that'll take me. There's some vermin up there that I reckon need exterminating."

Craighouse muttered something about discipline.

"To hell with discipline!" said Lieutenant Simpson, ex-mining engineer of Colorado. "I'm going——"

A corporal had halted before them and saluted. "O.C.'s compliments," he said tersely, "and the company is to go up the line as auxiliary infantry. Parade falling in now, sir. We move off in an hour."

When the officers reached their headquarters

they found a scene of bustling activity. Gas-masks were being inspected, ammunition supplied, first-aid packages given out where they had been lost, rifles cleaned and inspected, and all the accouterments of war checked and shortages replaced.

Craighouse strode up to his section, ignoring the sergeant's salute. "We're going into this scrap," he said quietly, though his voice vibrated oddly, "and I want every mother's son of you to see red. There's a girl out on that road who is dying of fever, and its fear of the Hun that is driving her on, and before night she'll be lying dead by the side of the road. She's somebody's daughter—somebody's sister—and, by Heaven, we'll make the Hun pay for it! What do you say, you Yankee sons o' guns?"

They cheered him to the echo, and some of them swore, and some of them laughed (but the laugh had a cruel ring in it), and some of them felt the salt tears stinging their eyes—but every one saw red.

Craighouse slowly walked over to his hut to superintend the packing of his own things. In his heart was a great exaltation and a mad love



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

for the men who looked to him for leadership. In the seclusion of his hut he did what he had not done for years. He knelt for a moment by the side of his kit and prayed that he might quit himself like a man.

There are moments in war when men's very souls are touched by a nobility, by a compassion, by a reverence that rises above all creeds. Out of the depths they have risen to heights supernal.

### X

In a private ward at Abbeville an American officer lay in great pain, and tossed restlessly in a delirium of fever. A young woman in the uniform of a V.A.D. watched by his side, and, sponging his palms and forehead, sought to soothe him with a gentleness and a tenderness that a mother would show to her child. The man was badly wounded in chest and leg, and exposure had brought a fever to torment his sufferings. Once he sat up and glared wildly at her.

"Did the guns get away?" he cried. "Did they get away?"

MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

“Hush!” she said softly. “You must not talk. You are very ill.”

He sank back on the pillows and laughed. “There’s a girl lying dead on the road,” he said; “but there’s a crowd of Huns this morning who are answering the roll-call in hell.”

He was silent for several minutes, then frowned heavily. “Look here,” he said sternly, “I wish you would stop driving nails into my knee. Who do you think I am—Hindenburg?”

He laughed again, then groaned, and great drops of perspiration stood out on his brow. The woman ministered to him with the gentle firmness of her sex that rises to its best when face to face with suffering. She smoothed his pillows and shifted his position so that he might not irritate his wounds; and, as if soothed by her presence, he sighed weakly and broke into a little negro melody:

“All dat I got on de whole plantation,  
All dat I got in de whole creation,  
In de big roun’ worl’ or de deep-blue skies,  
Is dat fat li’l feller wid his mammy’s eyes,  
Li’l feller wid his mammy’s eyes.”

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

His voice was very low and soft. Then he suddenly sat up in bed and pointed past her. "Look!" he cried. "The cavalry! The cavalry! By Heaven, how they ride! Look at that officer! Great Scott! it's Oaklands!—Good old Oaklands!—Come on, men—one last fight!—Get those guns away—d' you hear? Get those guns away—*now!*"

Weak from the effort he had made, he sank back with a moan; and the woman stroked his brow, and kept back the tears which welled to her eyes. For half-an-hour he did not speak; then he went through the pantomime of lighting a cigarette.

"The reason I can't marry her," he said abruptly, "is the same reason that East is East and West is West. What can I offer her? She can't dress on two manuscripts a month; and, besides, she knows nothing of building bridges. If I made a great success I might come to her, but—as I am now—no—no." He solemnly shook his head and flicked the ash from the imaginary cigarette. "Can you picture Lady Dorothy in a pretty little cottage outside New York, helping



MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

me to write—my constant inspiration—the mother of my children? Can you picture her sharing my discouragements; telling me I can write if the whole world says I cannot; believing in me when I've lost belief in myself? Can you see her motoring into New York with me, and the two of us dining at Rector's to celebrate the acceptance of a play? Would she be happy in such a life? No—no—no; as Euclid says, it 'is absurd.' By the way, my dear fellow, you might shift the grand piano, will you? It is resting on my knee."

His voice trailed into silence, and he sank into a slumber. Twilight was throwing its cloak over the earth when he spoke again. His hand reached out, and she took it in both of hers.

"I thought I was dying," he murmured. "I think I should have died there—in that ditch—but Dorothy—Dorothy—was beside me. . . . She held my hand when everything went dark—she wept a little. . . . It was only a dream, I know; but I lived. She must never know I loved her—because——"

"Lawrence!" The word was low and stifled.

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“Lawrence”—that was all. Then she leaned over and kissed his lips.

*Galatea had come to life.*

### XI

The first darkening shadows of an August night crept over the lawns of Oaklands, and settled about the turrets of the house like a mist. Inside, in the music-room, a pale American officer was telling some story—a story that kept his listeners silent and made the distant cry of a hawk sound strangely eerie and loud. He had three auditors—an elderly man, who had an unlit cigarette in his fingers; a woman, with gray locks, who sat, motionless, with folded hands; and a young woman, whose brown hair was like gold, and in whose deep-blue eyes there was a mingled look of pain and love.

“We knew when dawn broke,” went on the American, “that we were outflanked, and we tried to get the guns away; but the Huns saw our move, and came at us with bayonets. We formed a line in front of the guns, Scots and Englishmen, and the few of our fellows who were

left, and we did our best to give the gunners a chance, but they were on us too soon. Everything looked over, when we heard the cavalry coming. God! how our men shouted as they saw the squadron—that is all there were—bear down on the Germans! Their officer seemed to bear a charmed life, for he thrust and cut like a demon, while his commands rang out above the whole shock and crash of the fight. The Germans fell back, and this officer wheeled about, shouting instructions for the guns and rallying his men. For the first time I saw his face as he rode up to me. It was your boy.”

There was a deathly silence for a moment, unbroken by a sound from his hearers, though a solitary tear fell slowly on the older woman’s cheek.

“We contrived to get the guns started back, and we retreated to a sunken road which gave us protection. It was on the way there that I was shot in the knee, but managed to keep up, when a shell lit between two guns and killed some of the horses. We had to leave them, and went on; but a few minutes later we heard a shout. The Germans were surging about the



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

guns, and the little group of cavalry had turned and charged right into the center of them. I was hit again, and dropped; but Simpson, one of our officers from Colorado, led our men back to their assistance, and they fought till only Simpson and eight others were left. Then he fell dead beside the body of your lad who had led the cavalry."

There was a long silence, broken finally by the voice of the older woman. "I am glad that Douglas died bravely," she said, and her voice was low and calm, "and I am proud that he lies in France beside a very gallant American gentleman."

As if by mutual consent, every one rose, and the two women left the room together.

The old nobleman stood by the fireplace and gazed at the undulating lawns that showed from the windows in the deepening shroud of night. "It was good of you to tell us that," he said; "it will make my wife's sorrow more easy to bear." He walked slowly to a window and passed his hand wearily over his brow. "Sometime," he went on gently, "I must show you his room. We are keeping it just as it was."

## MR. CRAIGHOUSE, SATIRIST

Craighouse said nothing, but in his heart was a great understanding.

The first silver rays of the moon were dancing on the grass, when the earl spoke again. "It is hard for my wife," he said; "but she will be proud to know that she gave everything she had for—for England."

The American's heart sank. "Everything?" he stammered. "You mean——"

The older man's head was bowed with the simple dignity of his grief. "I have not told her yet," he said, "but I received an Admiralty message to-day that my second son's destroyer has gone down. He is reported 'missing.' "

## XII

It was nearly an hour later, when Craighouse was wandering about the lawns in the glistening moonlight, that he heard the rustle of skirts behind him. It was Lady Dorothy, and her eyes were shining like twin-stars.

"I thought you would be here," she said. "It is a night that draws one to it."

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

“It is a night for memories,” he said quietly. “What bitter-sweet things they have become since we had war!”

“Yes;” and she sighed.

For a little time they spoke of the sorrows and the tragedies of their world; they talked of Oaklands, which would pass from her family because there was no heir; they played on the minor chords of life, and in their voices the melancholy elegy for beautiful things that had died found expression in their hushed and murmuring tones.

But they were young, and in the heart of youth there is always Spring; and the witchery of a moonlight night was calling to it. The minor strains trembled into silence, and the melody of hearts that are young took its place. She had deep-blue eyes that were never meant for tears, and he had a nature that responded to the beauty of life as an *Æolian* harp to the moods of the wind.

As men and maids have done for generations, they talked of themselves. (A dangerous topic when the moon is making fairy-rings upon the grass.) They traced their friendship from his



first visit, and lightly touched on the weary hours when she watched by his bedside in France. They laughed, they sighed, and once their fingers touched by accident, and he felt a thrill as the hot blood rushed to his cheeks. He experienced a sudden resentment against her wild-rose coloring, the marble fullness of her throat, and the luxury of silky, brown hair which held a vagrant moonbeam in a lingering caress. It was a protest of the brain to the senses against the allurements of beauty.

"We must never meet again," he said severely.

"You are right," she answered wistfully, and something like a smile lurked mischievously in the corners of her mouth. The moon plays havoc with men, but lends great discernment to the daughters of earth.

Another half-hour passed, full of words that meant so little and silences that meant so much. Then, with a quick contraction of his shoulders and a deepening frown, he turned and faced her squarely.

"I came to your home," he said, "to gather material for satire. I found it in your parents—in your brothers—in you. In my room are ten

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

completed articles which I am going to send to New York. They are my impressions of the English. They will be published as the psychology of England studied under the microscope of a satirist."

"And I form one of your satirical studies?"

"Yes. I referred to you as Galatea, and to myself as Pygmalion. You supply the feminine interest which is so necessary. I pictured you as a statue amidst stifling conventionality, and I was the artist who tried to bring you to life."

"With what success?"

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and his shoulders drooped listlessly. "The artist," he said, "fell in love with her the moment the marble became human. He was a fool."

"I am so sorry," she said gently; and for a brief moment—a very brief moment—her hand rested in his. Whereupon the moon was constrained to disappear behind a cloud to hide her smile. "And what happened to her?"

"Oh," he said, "being a woman, she decided to torture Pygmalion. She came out on the lawn at night with him, and, by the music of her

voice and the charm of her beauty, inflicted an hour's exquisite pain. I am like a man," he said, with an abrupt descent from the impersonal, "who knows that on the morrow he will be stricken with blindness, and is looking for the last time on a sunset." Whereupon Captain Craighouse sighed like the classic furnace, and Lady Dorothy Oaklands smiled again, though her eyes were glistening with a mysterious dew. "To-morrow morning," he went on, "the sculptor, sometimes known as Don Quixote, is going away to forget about the statue. It is the only thing he can do."

Her eyes were lowered to the ground. "The woman—Galatea," she murmured—"she just forgets, I suppose?"

"Women forget easily," he said, and thought he spoke the truth.

"Listen," she said, and her voice was so soft that he could just make out the half-whispered words; "let me tell you the real story of Pygmalion and Galatea. When the marble became life, she loved the artist who had created her soul. But he didn't return her love; it had been an experiment with him. So the woman in her froze and died, and Galatea became a statue again."



## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

He caught her hands in his, and his eyes flashed like brilliants. "Dorothy!" he cried, "you are not jesting? You are not just—cruel?"

She said nothing; but, oh, what eloquence sometimes lies in a woman's silence! Then did Captain Craighouse of New York say many things which would look absurd in the cold medium of print, but which sounded like sweet music to his companion on that moonlight August night. He likened her to a motif that remained in his life as a melody that haunts the memory. He told her he would scale the heights of fame to cast its laurels at her feet.

"You stupid boy," she laughed caressingly; "as if anything you could ever do would be finer than just this—that you are fighting for your country!"

In some mysterious way his hands reached her shoulders; and in an equally inexplicable manner she was suddenly in his arms, and her hot cheek was against his.

"Lawrence dear," she murmured, "Galatea only knew one thing about Pygmalion—that he

had brought her into being, and so she loved him. That was all."

And the moon, feeling that her evening had been a complete success, disappeared behind a cloud, and stayed there.

### XIII

A raw wind from the sea swept against the mammoth building of the *New York Monthly Journal*. The editor of that famous publication crossed to the rattling window and looked at Broadway, far beneath. A few drops of rain mingled with the dust that eddied about in little whirlpools of wind.

In his hand he held a long letter from Craighouse, and, after a pause, he re-read the ending.

. . . "And so I crept downstairs in the early morning and built a fire of my articles, in a grate. I am sorry to have failed you; but, if one would ridicule England, first let him go to the sea and watch the men that go out in ships—and the men that never come back from the sea. If he would scoff at the simple folk of England, first let him stop at a farm I saw, where an old

## THE BLOWER OF BUBBLES

man of seventy is toiling in the fields, that the King's horses and men may be fed; while his four sons sleep in France. If he would laugh at the old families of England, let him come to the old homes where every son went without a murmur, and where, too often, the last one fell beside his brothers, because England had called for men.

"If he would make the mothers of England a study for satire, first he should mock the woman at the foot of the Cross, for her love and their love, her grief and their grief, are one."

Like gnomes, the people on Broadway hurried on in an endless, diverging torrent of humanity.

THE END







